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# Before the Revisionist Controversy

**Hautsky, Bernstein,  
and the Meaning of Marxism,  
1895—1898**

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**H. Hendall Rogers**

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## Bibliographical Preface

(1992)

My dissertation eight years ago was unusual because of its focus on both Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein, its concentration on a relatively short period of time (mid-1895 to early 1898), and its extended consideration of the role played by key opponents (particularly Wilhelm Liebknecht, H. M. Hyndman, and Ernest Belfort-Bax) in shaping the thought of Kautsky and Bernstein. The present text differs from the original dissertation in several respects. Among other changes, from the original I deleted some material. I embodied a few additional primary sources. I surveyed recent secondary literature and drew upon it in some instances. However, I have not gone back to re-immersing myself in the primary and secondary sources to the extent I should have liked. That would have meant writing a new book, not publishing the earlier one.

In looking back over eight years, I realize how much the context of my work has changed. The dissertation was written during one high point in the Cold War; now Communism has collapsed in Eastern Europe. Further consideration of the secondary literature and conversations with scholars in Europe and America have provided valuable insights and presented alternative viewpoints, which in turn have raised questions for me. For a new book on this topic I would want to explore especially the following areas:

1. In the mid-1890's Kautsky and Bernstein agreed in their opposition to Liebknecht, Hyndman, and Bax. But did Kautsky and Bernstein so thoroughly agree on the socialist theory they defended? For example, did Kautsky remain closer to August Bebel's expectation of an imminent collapse than Bernstein did?

2. Who held the ideas which Kautsky and Bernstein rejected? In many cases they named their opponent. But in other instances they criticized ideas which appear to have been widespread among social democrats at the time, more widespread than I once realized.

3. Kautsky and Bernstein wanted a democratic state, but how liberal was Kautsky in the 1890's? For instance, what checks and balances would he have allowed to limit the power of a proletarian government in a democratic republic? Perhaps while considering the differences of Kautsky and Bernstein's thought from later Communism, on the one hand, I have failed sufficiently to note differences between them and Victorian English liberalism, on the other.

4. Kautsky and Bernstein sought a democratic republic in Germany both as the form of government under which the proletariat could gather strength and the form of government with which the



proletariat would rule. But how similar would this democratic republic be to existing bourgeois republics? And what characteristics did they imagine distinguishing the Dictatorship of the Proletariat from the democratic republic?

5. What precisely were the differences among Kautsky, Bernstein, and Rosa Luxemburg on the national question and on colonialism in the mid-1890's?

In both the original dissertation and in this shortened version, I have sought to describe the opinions of Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein of nearly a century ago. While seeking to do this as best I could, I have not attempted to verify whether their views were accurate—that is, whether their claims fit the factual reality of the day. Nor, for the most part, could I pursue the question of whether they correctly understood Marx, Engels, Liebknecht, Hyndman, or other socialists. To have answered this question would have required my studying the writings of these teachers, opponents, or contemporaries of Kautsky and Bernstein as much as I studied the work of the latter two. I have not done so. Scholars have debated whether Kautsky correctly understood Engels, or for that matter, whether Engels correctly interpreted Marx.

The original dissertation and this new version would have been impossible without the help of many librarians and archivists. I wish to thank the Warden and Fellows of Nuffield College, Oxford, for permission to consult the Fabian Society Papers there, the International Institute of Social History for permission to quote archival material, and especially the staff of the International Institute of Social History for their cooperation and assistance. I have benefited from the research of numerous scholars. But the mistakes are my own. While I suspect that my book contains errors, I also believe that it has some useful observations. I hope that those reading this text will do so critically, seeing it as one more contribution in a continuing dialog.

For the most part, work on the dissertation occurred in the years 1977 to 1983. My research and writing could not be full-time, since I left graduate school to begin college teaching in early 1979, and the most recent secondary sources which I consulted were published in the early 1980's. Books and articles since then show that scholarly interest in Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein has remained strong.

First, there are the longer works about either Kautsky or Bernstein, often covering much of the single individual's career. In his book published in 1981, *Karl Kautsky und der Marxismus der II. Internationale*, Reinhold Hünlich observed ways in which Kautsky's thought was not fatalistic. Hans-Jürgen Mende, *Karl*

*Kautsky. Vom Marxisten zum Opportunisten. Studie zur Geschichte des historischen Materialismus*, Berlin 1985, compared Kautsky's ideas to those of Lenin and considered Lenin's opinion of Kautsky at particular times.

Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Das Mandat des Intellektuellen. Karl Kautsky und die Sozialdemokratie*, Berlin 1986, has received praise for breaking new ground by looking at Kautsky's political function as an intellectual in a working-class party. Another recent longer work focusing on one of the social-democratic theoreticians is Dick Geary's *Karl Kautsky*, New York 1987. Geary sought to relate Kautsky's theory to the actual possibilities facing the SPD in the Second Reich and provided a helpful narrative of his evolving views on imperialism.

*Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898*, New York 1988, edited and translated by H. Tudor and J. M. Tudor, is an anthology of important texts, including some from the time-period considered in my dissertation. The book also contains an essay on Bernstein. Though the works of Kautsky translated and collected in *Karl Kautsky: Selected Political Writings*, edited by Patrick Goode, New York 1983, first appeared after the time-period considered here, they discuss issues important to the dissertation.

Of a more specialized nature are two Finnish books, Jukka Gronow, *On the Formation of Marxism. Karl Kautsky's Theory of Capitalism, the Marxism of the Second International and Karl Marx's Critique of Political Economy*, Helsinki 1986, and Markku Hyrkkänen, *Sozialistische Kolonialpolitik: Eduard Bernsteins Stellung zur Kolonialpolitik und zum Imperialismus 1882-1914*, Helsinki 1986.

Second, in Bremen in October 1988 there was a conference on Kautsky. Papers from the conference were collected for the book *Marxismus und Demokratie. Karl Kautskys Bedeutung in der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung*, Frankfurt/M. and New York 1992, edited by Jürgen Rojahn, Till Schelz-Brandenburg, and Hans-Josef Steinberg. I thank the International Institute of Social History for allowing me to see this text in its proof form.

Third, general histories of the German labor movement or the Social-Democratic Party of Germany must refer to Kautsky and Bernstein. For example, there are the 1985 edition of Helga Grebing's *History of the German Labour Movement*, Leamington Spa; the *Lern- und Arbeitsbuch deutsche Arbeiterbewegung*, Bonn - Bad Godesberg 1984, edited by Thomas Meyer; Detlef Lehnert, *Sozialdemokratie zwischen Protestbewegung und Regierungspartei*, Frankfurt/M. 1983; the English edition of Susanne Miller and Heinrich Potthoff, *A History of German Social Democracy. From 1848 to the Present*, Leamington Spa

1986; *Bernstein to Brandt. A Short History of German Social Democracy*, London 1987, edited by Roger Fletcher; and the journal article by Gerhard A. Ritter, "Die Sozialdemokratie im Deutschen Kaiserreich in sozialgeschichtlicher Perspektive," *Historische Zeitschrift*, CCXLIX (1989), 295-362.

Though they were published before my dissertation, I missed consulting L. Guttsman's *The German Social Democratic Party 1875-1939*, London 1981; and Gary P. Steenson's *"Not One Man! Not One Penny!": German Social Democracy, 1863-1914*, Pittsburgh 1981.

Fourth, any number of articles and books have appeared on particular issues mentioned in the dissertation. Hans-Josef Steinberg's valuable work continued in his "Die deutsche Sozial-Demokratie im wilhelminischen Reich," *Ergebnisse*, XIV (1981), 4-10, and "Wie marxistisch war die alte Sozialdemokratie?" *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, XXX (1983), 226-232.

On the issue of colonialism there were Norman Etherington, "Reconsidering Theories of Imperialism," *History and Theory*, XXI (1982), 1-36; Ephraim Nimni, "Great Historical Failure: Marxist Theories of Nationalism," *Capital & Class*, XXV (1985), 58-83; and the book by Charles A. Barone, *Marxist Thought on Imperialism: Survey and Critique*, London 1985. Summaries of Kautsky's, Bernstein's, and Rosa Luxemburg's views on colonialism appeared in M. C. Howard and J. E. King, *A History of Marxian Economics*, Princeton 1989, Vol. I: 1883-1929.

On the difficult question of the collapse theory there was F. R. Hansen, *The Breakdown of Capitalism. A History of the Idea in Western Marxism, 1883-1983*, Boston 1985. And on Kautsky's historical determinism there was Dick Geary, "Marx and the Natural Sciences: The Case of Karl Kautsky," *Internationale Tagung der Historiker der Arbeiterbewegung*, XIX (Sonderkonferenz 1983), 401-409.

Several articles and a book by Roger Fletcher look at Bernstein's relationship to revisionism and to the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* and also present his views on foreign policy. However, for the most part this author seems to have concentrated on Bernstein's career after the time-period examined in my dissertation.

It is difficult to generalize on this recent material, but there appear to be two tendencies. One is to question earlier judgments about Kautsky—for example, that his thought was fatalistic or that he was still dependent more on Darwinism than Marxism in the 1890's. The other is to try to place Kautsky and Bernstein more thoroughly into their historical context—for example, distinguishing among the different phases of their long careers instead of focusing on one period

as characteristic of their entire contribution or of attempting to make earlier statements fit later standpoints.

I find these tendencies compatible with my work. But I also realize that as new material like the above continues to be published there will occur further reconsideration of Kautsky and Bernstein in the mid-1890's, including correction of some views presented here.



## Abbreviations

<b>Beiträge</b>	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung</i>
<b>EB-KK</b>	Correspondence of Eduard Bernstein with Karl Kautsky, Kautsky Papers, KD V 118 to KD V 469, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam
<b>KK-EB</b>	Correspondence of Karl Kautsky with Eduard Bernstein, Kautsky Papers, C 81 to C 217, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam
	(Since the correspondence between Kautsky and Bernstein is cataloged by date, the catalog number is most often redundant. Accordingly, I have provided this number only where the date is uncertain.)
<b>IISH</b>	International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam
<b>ILP</b>	Independent Labour Party
<b>LHAP</b>	Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv Potsdam
<b>SDF</b>	Social Democratic Federation
<b>SPD</b>	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
<b>TUC</b>	Trades Union Congress
<b>ZSAM</b>	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin-Dahlem Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Abteilung Merseburg (formerly, Deutsches Zentrale Staatsarchiv Merseburg)
<b>ZSAP</b>	Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Abteilungen Potsdam (formerly, Deutsches Zentrale Staatsarchiv Potsdam)



## Chapter One: Introduction

### A. The Legacy of Friedrich Engels

Friedrich Engels, the friend of Karl Marx and co-founder with him of scientific socialism, died on August 5, 1895. For weeks Engels had suffered from cancer of the esophagus. Nonetheless, he had tried to continue working, preparing an article on volume three of *Capital* and reading a letter from Karl Kautsky.<sup>1</sup>

In accordance with Engels's wishes, only a small group of associates assembled at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, August 10, for a memorial service in London. The gathering included Eleanor Marx; her sister Laura and brother-in-law Paul Lafargue; Edward Aveling; Louise Freyberger (Engels's housekeeper and the former wife of Kautsky); August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, and Eduard Bernstein representing the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands or SPD); and Harry Quelch of the local Social Democratic Federation (SDF). Wreaths and flowers enshrouded the coffin. Then a special train carried the body to Rockwood for cremation. Engels's testament named Bernstein as an executor and specified that he and Bebel were to care for Engels's literary effects. Bernstein wrote Kautsky that Engels had known that Bernstein would not misinterpret his writings.<sup>2</sup>

Given Engels's importance in the social-democratic movement, his death had a significant impact on its intellectual history. In a September 1895 letter to the Austrian socialist leader Victor Adler, the German leader Ignaz Auer analyzed the dilemma accurately,

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<sup>1</sup>EB-KK August 4, 1895. Hans Georg Lehmann, *Die Agrarfrage in der Theorie und Praxis der deutschen und internationalen Sozialdemokratie. Vom Marxismus zum Revisionismus und Bolschewismus* (Tübingen, 1970), p. 171.

<sup>2</sup>EB-KK August 4, 1895; *Justice*, August 17, 1895, p. 6. EB-KK September 4, 1895. Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky . . .*, Friedrich Adler, ed. (Vienna, 1954), p. 183; Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism. Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1962), p. 68. Reproductions of photographs of several of the individuals discussed in this book are found later, 417-425.

Where the Old Man is irreplaceable is the interpretation of scripture. With all respect for the younger Church Fathers, the rich experience and authority of Engels is absent even with Kautsky; Ede [Bernstein] is beginning to doubt himself; and Plekhanov is too foreign to the masses for him to exercise influence on them. Accordingly we shall have to get along for awhile without a "Source of Truth"; and this may often be noticed as uncomfortable.<sup>3</sup>

Thus there ensued a three-year search for Engels's successor as the recognized authority on Marxism. The search ended in October 1898 when the SPD's Stuttgart party congress turned to Kautsky for leadership against Bernstein in the Revisionist Controversy.

From early in the year Bernstein had been attacked repeatedly in the socialist press and praised in the bourgeois journals; and in September Clara Zetkin, the social-democratic women's leader, had proposed that his revisionist ideas were responsible for the disappointing size of the party's vote in the Reichstag elections the past spring. Bernstein had doubted whether the SPD could govern effectively if political power were suddenly thrust upon it following the economic collapse and general catastrophe which many social democrats assumed must precede the end of capitalism and the proletariat's taking power. In place of this Zusammenbruch, Bernstein envisioned reforms within the existing social-economic system through cooperation with other political parties and classes. He acknowledged legitimate national interests and stressed the role of trade unions and cooperatives alongside legal parliamentary action. He questioned whether capital was concentrating or the proletariat maturing as quickly as some supposed. He had written openly that Marx and Engels had erred on important points. People were particularly troubled by his January 1898 statement in *Neue Zeit* that what was normally implied by

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<sup>3</sup> Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 189f., September 26, 1895; also quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 202. When I acknowledge prior use of documents, as I do here, I do not wish to imply that these scholars would necessarily agree with my interpretation of the documents.

In the footnotes, sources of quotations are generally listed first. Except for passages from the *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York, 1972) or where indicated, English translations are my responsibility.

"final goal of socialism" meant nothing to him, the "movement" everything.<sup>4</sup>

How could Eduard Bernstein, one of Marxism's pre-eminent theoreticians and the colleague of Engels and Kautsky, come to say such things? And why did Karl Kautsky, the era's foremost exponent of historical materialism after Engels, wait so long to reply? This is our story.

The story is an exciting one. The polemical battle which raged from Engels's death in August 1895 to the beginning of the Revisionist Controversy in January 1898 touched on important questions in social theory: for example, the purpose of the state or how historical change occurs. Vital political issues were debated, some of relevance still today: colonialism, national self-determination, welfare capitalism, socialization of essential industries, the threat of war. The SPD wrestled with its position vis-à-vis the peasants, the bourgeoisie, and the government. Did the political program of Marx and Engels call for scholarly study, parliamentary democracy, and gradual social evolution; or rather for utopian speculation, economic collapse, and the sudden taking of power; or for some other combination of actions and events? The wider discussion involved many intellectual champions of the European left: in addition to Bebel, Bernstein, and Kautsky there were Rosa Luxemburg on the Continent and Fabian luminaries like George Bernard Shaw, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, James Ramsay MacDonald, and a young Bertrand Russell in England. Fuel for the controversy was provided by significant events of the day—for example, the Jameson raid into the Transvaal, national aspirations in Poland, repression in Saxony and Prussia, and unrest in the Near East. For nearly a century European history and thought has been influenced by the ideas, issues, and intellectuals of the time between the death of Engels and the Revisionist Controversy.

During these months the central issue for Kautsky and Bernstein was how to interpret Marxism correctly now that Engels was gone. Kautsky supported Bernstein for so long because they basically still agreed on this matter—that is, they agreed on the meaning of Marxism. Both understood historical materialism to be a method of analysis, not a collection of research results; they saw in it an approach to studying actual events, not a prescription for how history must occur. Both would have seconded Engels's statement to Werner Sombart in March 1895:

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<sup>4</sup>See later, 406 and 409.



But Marx's entire manner of comprehending is not a doctrine, rather a method. It provides no finished dogmas, rather criteria for further exploration and the method for this exploration.<sup>5</sup>

Both Kautsky and Bernstein thought that with Marx and Engels socialism had become scientific; Kautsky and Bernstein believed that an underlying process of social-economic development was moving toward socialism and also that social democrats should seek political actions and reforms appropriate to the current stage of evolution. Both Kautsky and Bernstein dismissed any utopianism ignoring material conditions or intending to realize the new order through an act of mere will. Both read Marx historically. They admitted that some of his accurate conclusions of a by-gone age might no longer apply and that Marx himself might have made some mistakes. In 1892, before Engels's death, Bernstein insisted,

All results of research by Marx and Engels claim validity only so long as they have not been refuted by new scientific research. Some ultimately final truth is not recognized by Marxism, neither for itself nor for others.

In November 1898 Kautsky could still praise Bernstein's critical approach, while not accepting his findings:

It is beyond doubt that our economic and political life in the last two decades has begun to develop tendencies which were still hidden at the time our basic texts were written, especially the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*. A new examination, a revision of our concepts has been made necessary by these new facts. Various comrades have emphasized this already, but no one has brought it so clearly

<sup>5</sup>Engels is quoted in Detlef Lehnert, *Reform und Revolution in den Strategiediskussionen der klassischen Sozialdemokratie* (Bonn - Bad Godesberg, 1977), p. 109. On Marxism as a method of research, not a model of historical development, see Gay, p. 161, and Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Johanna Hoornweg, tr., with an Introduction by Tony Cliff and a Postscript by I. Fetscher (New York, 1972), p. 49.

to our awareness as has Bernstein. It is here that I see his greatest service . . . .<sup>6</sup>

My hypothesis is that in the two and one-half years before the Revisionist Controversy many of its key issues appeared while Kautsky and Bernstein labored hand-in-hand to defend against misinterpretation the mature understanding of Marxism which they had learned under Engels's tutelage.<sup>7</sup> The defense occurred on three levels: (a) explaining the SPD's Erfurt Program, (b) interpreting the party's program in such a way as to protect it from non-Marxist socialist ideas, and (c) correcting specific errors Marx allegedly made, but keeping his method. In late 1897 Bernstein explicitly questioned certain aspects of the method, opening the way for conflict with Kautsky. But at first,

<sup>6</sup>Bernstein in *Neue Zeit*, XIa (1892-1893), 10, is quoted by Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Zur Ideologie der Partei vor dem 1. Weltkrieg* (Hanover, 1967), p. 90. Kautsky in *Neue Zeit*, XVIIa (1898-1899), 220, is quoted on p. xxxv of Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," in *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky, Jr., ed. (Assen, 1971).

<sup>7</sup>For use of the term "mature," see later, 410. On the challenge for Kautsky and Bernstein having been to refute a misunderstanding of Marxism see Christian Gneuss, "Die historische und ideologische Voraussetzungen für die Herausbildung des Revisionismus bei Eduard Bernstein," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus. Bericht über den wissenschaftlichen Kongreß "Die historische Leistung und aktuelle Bedeutung Eduard Bernsteins"*, Horst Heimann and Thomas Meyer, eds. (Berlin, 1978), p. 80; and Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 89.

On Engels's thought possibly being one source for Bernstein's revisionist thinking see Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 90; Gneuss, "Historische und ideologische Voraussetzungen," p. 79; Christian Gneuss, "Um den Einklang von Theorie und Praxis. Eduard Bernstein und der Revisionismus," *Marxismusstudien*, II (1957), 206; and Christian Gneuss, "The Precursor: Eduard Bernstein," in *Revisionism. Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas*, Leopold Labedz, ed. (London, 1962), pp. 35-37.

Whether Kautsky or Bernstein in the 1890's had correctly understood Engels is a much debated issue. For our purposes it is enough that they believed their Marxism was that of Engels.



Bernstein's controversial ideas appeared in criticism not of Marx and Engels but of alleged misunderstandings of their work, and accordingly much of Bernstein's critique found Kautsky's enthusiastic approval.

The ideas which Kautsky and Bernstein took to be misunderstandings of Marxism were often those of Wilhelm Liebknecht in Germany or his admirers in the SDF, particularly Henry Mayers Hyndman and Ernest Belfort-Bax, in England. Liebknecht and Hyndman emphasized Marx's conclusions, not his method, and sometimes made his ideas into absolutes. Among them Liebknecht, Hyndman, and Bax also retained non-Marxist socialist notions, some from Ferdinand Lassalle. Though Liebknecht and the SDF acknowledged each other's work and though Kautsky and Bernstein recognized their collaboration, one should not assume that a particular idea would be shared by Liebknecht, Hyndman, and Bax. Differences existed among them. For example, Liebknecht rejected the notion of necessary proletarian impoverishment. In the early 1890's this idea was still found among social democrats and commonly identified as Marxist, as were expectations of impending economic collapse and of intensifying overt class conflict.<sup>8</sup>

In the early 1890's Kautsky and Bernstein had relied on Engels's help. Engels disliked Hyndman and had repeatedly criticized the SDF. However, Engels's illness from 1893 onward limited this assistance, as did conditions in his household. Bax visited there frequently. Louise Freyberger felt animosity toward her first husband, Karl Kautsky, of whom Bernstein was the close friend.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Nor did Kautsky and Bernstein feel emotionally the same about their different opponents. While they seem to have experienced great dislike for Bax or Hyndman at times, their attitude toward Liebknecht appears to have been more one of frustration or pity.

The question of whether Kautsky and Bernstein accurately understood their opponents is not answered here. My goal has been only to describe the thinking of Kautsky and Bernstein in the mid-1890's, so I have looked at the polemics through their writings, for the most part. A complete study would require equal consideration of others involved in the debate—not only Liebknecht, Bax, and Hyndman but also Bebel, Luxemburg, the Fabians, Franz Mehring, and more.

<sup>9</sup>The difficult situation in Engels's household is discussed in the following correspondence: EB-KK June 5, 1893; EB-KK February 27, 1894; and EB-KK November 11, 1894. Thomas Meyer, *Bernsteins*

In his struggle against Hyndman and Bax, Bernstein found allies in the Fabians, who had formulated their theory in conflict with the SDF leader. Because the Fabians emphasized the study of material conditions and because a Marxist analysis of English conditions could result in policies like certain ones of the Fabians, Bernstein came to see them as closer to Marxism than was the SDF.

However, these same policies would not have worked in the Second Reich. Too often Bernstein's writings from exile in England were applied to Germany as well. In part Bernstein was to blame, for he wanted to criticize Liebknecht along with the SDF. And with time, perhaps he had forgotten the full extent of the differences between the two countries.

In 1898 intellectual disagreement between Kautsky and Bernstein arose primarily over two issues. First, Bernstein's views seemed plausible in England after a successful bourgeois revolution but not in Germany before one. For Kautsky the essential difference between Bernstein and himself lay in the conviction that Germany still faced a violent political confrontation. Second, in the months from mid-1896 through August 1897, Bernstein slowly came to conclude that Marx and Engels had once believed social revolution might occur in a catastrophic manner.<sup>10</sup> As Bernstein came to associate the term "Marxism" in this respect with the thought of Hyndman and Bax and as Kautsky grew in his expectation of a bitter confrontation with the Reich, the two friends separated. The legacy of Engels forced them apart even as it had once drawn them together.

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*konstruktiver Sozialismus. Eduard Bernsteins Beitrag zur Theorie des Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1977), p. 30.

<sup>10</sup>Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," pp. xxxixf.; KK-EB February 18, 1898; and EB-KK February 21, 1898. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 194, 380f. and 383. Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 80-82; Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854-1938. Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh, 1978), pp. 119 and 226f.; John H. Kautsky, "J. A. Schumpeter and Karl Kautsky. Parallel Theories of Imperialism," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, II (May 1961), 127; and John Hans Kautsky, "The Political Thought of Karl Kautsky. A Theory of Democratic, Anti-Communist Marxism," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1951, pp. 138-141.

## B. Learning About Marxism

Only with Engels had historical materialism taken hold in the German labor movement. The writings of Marx were not well known in the 1870's, while the influence of Lassalle was waning. In this time of intellectual transition appeared Eugen Dühring. The blind professor's pro-socialist stance and his skepticism about the state (that is, his liberalism) at first attracted Bernstein, and others. Liebknecht appealed to Engels to counter the party's infatuation with Dühring, and Engels responded with a series of articles in the Leipzig *Vorwärts* beginning in 1877. Republished on the eve of the Anti-Socialist Laws in 1878 as *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* or the *Anti-Dühring*, they became a classic of Marxist thought. Kautsky and Bernstein learned their Marxism from the *Anti-Dühring*.<sup>1</sup>

Born in 1850 in Berlin, Bernstein had grown up in a lower middle-class environment characterized by liberalism and latent German nationalism. The stand of Bebel and Liebknecht against the Franco-Prussian War inspired him. He studied their ideas and joined their Eisenach Party in 1872. In 1875 he participated in the Gotha congress where the Eisenach group merged with the Lassallean faction of the German workers' movement to form the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands), which became the SPD in October 1890. In 1878 he journeyed to Switzerland as secretary to the philanthropic socialist Karl Höchberg. In 1879 Bernstein moved to Zurich, where he met Kautsky the subsequent year.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 11f. and 325 and 325 note 75a; Pierre Angel, *Eduard Bernstein et l'Evolution du Socialisme Allemand* (Paris, 1961), pp. 52f.; Wadim Tschubinski, *Wilhelm Liebknecht. Eine Biographie*, Bernhard Jahnel, tr. (Berlin, 1973), pp. 190-193; Gay, pp. 25, 95, 97, and 101-103; and Bo Gustafsson, *Marxismus und Revisionismus. Eduard Bernsteins Kritik des Marxismus und ihre ideengeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*, Holger Heide, tr. (Frankfurt/M., 1972), pp. 29f. and 79.

<sup>2</sup>General information or commentary about Bernstein's boyhood and early days in the socialist movement is found in Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, pp. 15-53; and Gay, pp. 19-43. Hans Mommsen, "Nationalismus und nationale Frage im Denken Eduard Bernsteins," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, p. 133; and Robert S. Wistrich,

Born in Prague in 1854 and raised in Vienna in a middle-class artistic family, Kautsky was also inspired by events surrounding the Franco-Prussian War, specifically the Paris Commune. He entered the Austrian social-democratic movement in 1875. Höchberg subsidized Kautsky's first book, a study of Malthus, and then encouraged him to move to Zurich to write for the socialist press and to continue study. Kautsky arrived there in early 1880.<sup>3</sup>

Kautsky and Bernstein would later count the next few years together among the most rewarding of their lives. Bernstein remembered,

Because of our common views with respect to Marx and Engels's theory of history and society, which we both accepted, there developed between us a very close friendship and a feeling like that between two soldiers fighting side by side in battle. We rented neighboring rooms in Fluntern above Zurich in a free standing house in the Näglistraße; ate in the same inn at noon and in the evening; and together frequented mountain, forest, or lake whenever possible. And though we labored separately because of the differing natures of our occupations, each still took the most lively interest in the other's activities. Together we helped out on specified days at the *Sozialdemokrat* press building to send this newspaper of the struggle into the German Empire; and together we attended the socialist meetings, too.

And Kautsky recalled,

There I found a powerful leader in Eduard Bernstein. . . . Five years older than I and grown up in Berlin with the stimulation of the liveliest socialist movement the world knew at the time, he was far ahead of me and gave me rich stimulation and insights. He had overcome his temporary leaning toward Dühring and had planted both feet on the ground of Marxism. Eagerly we studied the Marxist

"Eduard Bernstein und das Judentum," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup>Stenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 20, 38, and 41f.; Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Das Mandat des Intellektuellen: Karl Kautsky und die Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin, 1986), p. 20.

literature together and through this soon became so much one heart and soul that people thought of us as a kind of red Orestes and Pylades.<sup>4</sup>

Both Kautsky and Bernstein carefully studied the *Anti-Dühring*. Both repeatedly referred to the importance of this text in their conversion to Marxism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Bernstein, "Kautskys erstes Wirken in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie," in *Karl Kautsky, dem Wehrer und Mehrer der Marx'schen Lehre zum siebzigsten Geburtstage. Ein Sonderheft der "Gesellschaft,"* Rudolf Hilferding, ed. (Frankfurt/M., 1968), p. 70. This is a reprint of the Berlin 1932 edition; the first edition was Berlin 1924. Kautsky is quoted by Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," p. xxx. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 45f.

<sup>5</sup>Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 12; Gay, p. 43; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 34f. and 264 note 37; Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 23; Gilcher-Holtey, p. 36; Walter Holzheuer, *Karl Kautskys Werk als Weltanschauung. Beitrag zur Ideologie der Sozialdemokratie vor dem ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1972), pp. 26f.

Kautsky has been interpreted as following a naturalistic determinism which denied, to a great extent, the role of human consciousness and will as a force in historical change. Some scholars have explained this viewpoint with Kautsky's reading of the *Anti-Dühring*. Others have attributed it to Kautsky's earlier interest in Charles Darwin, Ernst Haeckel, Ludwig Büchner, and Thomas Henry Buckle. Still others, to these latter influencing Kautsky's reading of Engels. Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 51f., suggests that by the 1890's Kautsky had overcome any naturalistic determinism he may have held earlier. More recent scholarship seems to concur. See Gilcher-Holtey, pp. 86-88; Reinhold Hünlich, "Gab es einen Kautskyanismus in der Epoche der II. Internationale?" in *Marxismus und Demokratie. Karl Kautskys Bedeutung in der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung*, Jürgen Rojahn, Till Schelz-Brandenburg, and Hans-Josef Steinberg, eds. (Frankfurt/M. and New York, 1992), pp. 49-51; Reinhold Hünlich, *Karl Kautsky und der Marxismus der II. Internationale* (Marburg, 1981), pp. 16f.; and Marek Waldenberg, "Kautskys Marx-Rezeption," in *Marxismus und Demokratie*, pp. 34 and 40.

Shortly before meeting Kautsky, Bernstein had been involved with the infamous "Three-Star Article," an affair which proved nearly disastrous for his Marxist career. Allegedly composed by Karl Flesch, Karl Schramm, and Karl Höchberg, the essay proposed an appeal to the bourgeoisie despite the Anti-Socialist Laws. In their "Circular Letter" of 1879, Marx and Engels repudiated the article:

For almost forty years we have stressed the class struggle as the immediate driving power of history and in particular the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat as the great lever of the modern social revolution; it is, therefore, impossible for us to cooperate with people who wish to expunge this class struggle from the movement. When the International was formed we expressly formulated the battle cry: The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. We cannot, therefore, cooperate with people who openly state that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves and must first be freed from above by philanthropic big bourgeois and petty bourgeois.

Bernstein claimed to have contributed only a little to the "Three-Star Article." The essence was as follows:

Out of the correct attempt to give the working class a consciousness and a power equal to its worth there developed here and there a—what should we call it?—crawling before the workers, an exalted praise for all their characteristics, including the bad.<sup>6</sup>

The incident prejudiced Marx and Engels against Bernstein's working with the *Sozialdemokrat*. In late 1880 the need arose for an acting editor under Liebknecht. Bebel considered Kautsky, but in December he took Bernstein to London. Marx and Engels were convinced of Bernstein's thorough acceptance of historical materialism. In 1898 Bebel reminded Bernstein,

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<sup>6</sup>*The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 405. Bernstein's contribution is quoted in Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 14 note 48; see also pp. 13f. Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, pp. 62-64; Gustafsson, pp. 80f.; and Gay, pp. 43f.



So we returned home with the needed "absolution"; you became editor of the *Sozialdemokrat*; and in the Zurich environment amidst our comrades, who under the disgraceful conditions of the Socialist Laws were in the most revolutionary mood, you were the most excellent representative of their views and aspirations. This was the high point of your life, and no one supported you more ardently than Marx and Engels.

Bernstein edited the *Sozialdemokrat* in Switzerland until 1888, when the German government managed to have the newspaper expelled. It then appeared in London until the end of the Anti-Socialist Laws in 1890. Remaining in Great Britain because of a German warrant for his arrest, in the 1890's Bernstein wrote for the party's new central organ, *Vorwärts. Berliner Volksblatt*, with Liebknecht chief editor in Berlin. Bernstein also contributed regularly to the *Neue Zeit*.<sup>7</sup>

While Bernstein promoted Engels's interpretation of Marx through the *Sozialdemokrat*, Kautsky did so through the *Neue Zeit*. He later explained,

To propagate the new understanding now constituted our entire effort. Bernstein edited the Zurich *Sozialdemokrat* in this sense. I sought to create a sphere of activity for me through a journal which I could publish in Germany despite the Socialist Laws.

In 1882 he contacted J. H. W. Dietz of Stuttgart about publishing a monthly journal for socialist theory. Guaranteed the direct involvement of Bebel and Liebknecht and a financial contribution to the project from Kautsky and his friends, Dietz agreed. Kautsky edited the *Neue Zeit* until 1917, and perhaps no periodical was so important for Marxist theory in Central Europe.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Bebel to Bernstein, October 16, 1898, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 256. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 46; Tschubinski, pp. 207f. and 214f.; Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 13 and 15; Gay, pp. 44-47, 57, and 60f.

<sup>8</sup>Kautsky is quoted by Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," p. xxi. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 50; Erich Matthias, "Kautsky und der Kautskyanismus. Die Funktion der Ideologie in der deutschen

In addition, Kautsky and Bernstein collaborated with Engels on individual texts popularizing Marx. In 1884 appeared the German translation of Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which Engels had assigned to Kautsky and Bernstein. Engels advised Kautsky on his *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*, published in 1887, and on his study of Thomas More. Engels consulted with Kautsky while preparing *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy; The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*; and the controversial Introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*. In 1891 Engels supported Kautsky and Bernstein in drafting the Erfurt Program, which served as the program of the SPD for thirty years and provided a model for socialist parties around the world. Later Kautsky wrote his famous exposition *The Erfurt Program. Its Section on Principles Explained*. Such writings had immense influence. One person avowed,

In the months June through September 1897 I studied Kautsky's books [*Economic Doctrines* and *Erfurt Program Explained*] daily. Thereby I forged my intellectual armor. I read the works again and again, until their meaning became unforgettable. It gave me the certainty of a new era of human happiness, the rock solid conviction that "the Promised Land" was a reality.

It created a solid foundation for the vague messianic longings of my childhood and made the classical ideal I had learned in Gymnasium a future certainty for all humankind.<sup>9</sup>

Sozialdemokratie vor dem ersten Weltkrieg," *Marxismusstudien*, II (1957), 152; Tschubinski, p. 224; and Hermann Brill, "Karl Kautsky," *Zeitschrift für Politik*, New Series, I (1954), 225-229.

<sup>9</sup>Sam de Wolff, "Was Karl Kautsky uns lehrte," in *Ein Leben für den Sozialismus. Erinnerungen an Karl Kautsky*, Benedikt Kautsky, ed. (Hanover, 1954), p. 62. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 66f.; and Brill, pp. 215-217.

## C. The Erfurt Program and Wilhelm Liebknecht

In 1887 the St. Gall party congress of the SPD had established a commission of Liebknecht, Bebel, and Auer to prepare a new program to replace the Gotha Program of 1875. Of particular concern was the latter's Lassallean appeal to the state, which the Anti-Socialist Laws made ridiculous. This issue touched on a basic difference between Lassalle and Marx. Lassalle pictured the state as being above class interests; he wanted the government to aid the proletariat by establishing production cooperatives; and while he sought an extended suffrage, he questioned working-class cooperation with the bourgeoisie against the monarchy. Marx, in contrast, taught that the state was an instrument of class rule. The proletariat should back the progressive bourgeois in battle for liberal and democratic change, in preparation for eventual proletarian rule.<sup>1</sup> In 1890 the Halle party congress heard Liebknecht clarify why the commission had made no progress, attack Lassallean aspects of the old program, and submit a resolution proposing that a new program draft be circulated at least three months before the next congress.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Here the term "liberal" refers to that classical political liberalism characterized by a desire for government circumscribed by law and a desire for respect for civil liberties (freedom of speech, press, assembly, organization, and religion) and the rights of the individual. The term "democratic" refers to the principle of self-government by the people, be it directly through some type of participatory democracy or indirectly through freely elected representatives (parliament, congress, diet). In practice, democracy called for universal equal suffrage and responsible government.

<sup>2</sup>Guenther Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany* (Totowa, New Jersey, 1963), p. 42; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 93; Tschubinski, pp. 241f. and 259; and Gay, pp. 31-33 and 93. Liebknecht's questioning the Lassallean "iron law of wages" at Halle is reported in *Neue Zeit*, IXa (1890-1891), 295.

See Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Wie marxistisch war die alte Sozialdemokratie?" *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, XXX (1983), 228, on the experience of the Anti-Socialist Laws as defeating Lassalleanism and opening the way for Marxism in German social democracy. See also Gerhard A. Ritter, *Die Arbeiterbewegung im Wilhelminischen Reich. Die*

Liebknecht's taking charge of the drafting process posed a concern for Engels, Bernstein, and Kautsky. Engels had long been dissatisfied with Liebknecht's capabilities in regard to theory. Bernstein remembered his disappointment in Liebknecht as a theoretician in the early 1880's:

I do not believe that he had read especially much or intensely, and as for theory he was even then no longer my teacher, for I was submerging myself in Marxism, among the masters of which he could not be numbered. As far as his intellectual leaning went, Liebknecht sooner belonged to the socialists of the French school.

In 1894 Kautsky suggested to Bebel that Liebknecht's significance had begun to decline with Marx's death in 1883. Liebknecht still possessed sympathy, not major influence. A few years later Bebel commented about Liebknecht, "The older he gets, the more self-contradictory he becomes; he can make one sad." Far from stating Marxism clearly, Liebknecht mixed in Lassallean and populist-democratic notions.<sup>3</sup>

In his program speech at Halle, Liebknecht had employed Marx's letter, the "Critique of the Gotha Program," sent him in 1875. This use of the letter upset Engels. So he sought both to check the influence of Lassallean ideas and to limit Liebknecht's authority by having Kautsky publish Marx's "Critique" in *Neue Zeit*. The letter severely attacked the Gotha Program and its authors. Liebknecht replied that a compromise with the Lassalleans had been necessary, but Engels rejected the excuse. He declared to Bebel, "We recognized and I still recognize him [Liebknecht] as the father of the unification program—in respect to its weak aspects." Engels believed that

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*Sozialdemokratische Partei und die Freien Gewerkschaften 1890-1900* (Berlin, 1959), pp. 10-12.

<sup>3</sup>Bernstein, *Aus den Jahren meines Exils*, 2nd. ed. (Berlin, 1918), p. 136; the Bebel-Kautsky correspondence is quoted in Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," p. xxv. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 269 note 35; Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 15.

See also Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel mit Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels*, Georg Eckert, ed. (the Hague, 1963), p. 7; Gustafsson, pp. 28f.; and Helmut Hirsch, *Friedrich Engels in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumente* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg, 1968), pp. 86f.

Liebkecht had intentionally kept the "Critique" from Bebel. And Engels had not asked Bebel about publishing the "Critique," expecting that Liebkecht would try to intervene.<sup>4</sup>

Kautsky grasped the implication of the Marx essay. Still, he went ahead, for several reasons: (a) If he had not published it, Engels would have sent it elsewhere; (b) Engels took responsibility; and (c) Kautsky supposed that Bebel knew what Engels intended. Unfortunately, Bebel did not. Kautsky had expected strong criticism from certain groups in the party, but Bebel's anger disturbed him. Kautsky considered the possibility of losing his position with *Neue Zeit*. Bernstein stood shoulder to shoulder with Kautsky through the crisis, writing his friend, "Regarding the Marx article affair I so thoroughly agree with what you have written that I have absolutely nothing to add. You have handled yourself in the matter correctly from A to Z." While Kautsky's personal relationship with Liebkecht never recovered, Bernstein began to suspect that Liebkecht wished to fire him from the *Vorwärts* staff, and their cooperation became more difficult.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Engels to Bebel on May 1 and 2, 1891, in *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels*, Werner Blumenberg, ed. (The Hague, 1965), pp. 413-415. One might compare Engels's views with those of Bernstein, quoted in Gay, p. 38. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 392. Liebkecht argued in *Vorwärts* that the Gotha Program had been a compromise, as reported in *Neue Zeit*, IXa (1890-1891), 685. In *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 723f., Kautsky remarked that theoretical clarity had greatly increased within the party since the Gotha Program had been written.

David S. Rosen, "German Social Democracy between Bismarck and Bernstein: Georg von Vollmar and the Reformist Controversy, 1890-1895," Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1975, pp. 36f.; Gustav Mayer, *Friedrich Engels* (The Hague, 1934), II, 480-483; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 95; Wolfgang Schröder and Gustav Seeber, "Zur Vorbereitung des Erfurter Programms," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, XIV (1966), 1121; Gilcher-Holtey, pp. 62f.

<sup>5</sup>EB-KK February 23, 1891. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 94-96. Kautsky and Bernstein discussed publication of the "Critique" in their correspondence: KK-EB January 8, 1891; EB-KK January 9, 1891; EB-KK January 16, 1891; KK-EB January 29, 1891; KK-EB January 30, 1891; EB-KK February 16, 1891; EB-KK February 19, 1891. Bernstein's sense of Liebkecht's growing dislike is reflected in

The publication of Marx's "Critique of the Gotha Program" in late January 1891 limited the inclusion of Lassallean ideas in the program draft made that spring. The party executive committee (Parteivorstand) discussed a draft written by Liebkecht and a proposal from Bebel. Then Liebkecht composed his second draft, which was circulated in June to Engels, Bernstein, Kautsky, the SPD Reichstag delegation (Fraktion), and other leaders. Engels was still upset. He wrote Kautsky on June 29, 1891,

First I wanted to try to make the introductory remarks somewhat tighter but did not manage this for lack of time. It also seemed more important to me to take apart the sometimes unavoidable sometimes avoidable defects of the political section since this gave me opportunity to strike at the peace-loving opportunism of *Vorwärts* and the fresh-fervent-happy-free "evolution" of the old rottenness "into the socialist society."

Engels did not share the hope that capitalism could evolve into socialism without the laborers conquering political power. In an extended letter Engels told Liebkecht that the SPD should seek a democratic republic as the foundation for proletarian rule. The program could incorporate this goal through demands for placing political power in representative bodies, for self-administration in local government, and for universal suffrage. In July 1891, after rejecting an initial alternative draft from Kautsky, the executive committee published its own revised draft, embodying its response to some of Engels's concerns.<sup>6</sup>

In three *Neue Zeit* articles Kautsky sought to expose both problems in this July proposal and also non-Marxist assumptions present in the Gotha Program or in contemporary socialist thought:

EB-KK March 11, 1891. Liebkecht's relationship to Kautsky is discussed by Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 96.

<sup>6</sup>Engels to Kautsky, June 29, 1891, in "Briefe über den Erfurter Parteitag," Brigitte Rieck, ed., *Beiträge*, VIII (1966), 996. Tschubinski, pp. 264f. Engels's critique is in *Marx-Engels Werke*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, ed. (Berlin, 1957ff.), XXII, 225-240. A description of the drafting process is in Horst Bartel, "Karl Kautsky. Sein Anteil an der Entstehung und Propagierung des Erfurter Programms," in *Gestalten der Bismarckzeit*, Gustav Seeber, ed. (Berlin, 1978), pp. 427-436.



state socialism, utopianism, direct legislation, the Lassallean slogan of "one reactionary mass," the supposed desirableness of proletarian impoverishment, the role assigned the amorphous group "the people." Kautsky opposed fatalism and extreme voluntarism. In his opinion, the proletariat would bring change, but only under certain social-economic conditions.<sup>7</sup>

Bernstein supported Kautsky's challenge to the proposed program. He added a critical introduction to his edition of Lassalle's works. He finished a long series of articles questioning Lassalle's "iron law of wages," a principle which if true would make futile trade-union organization and labor legislation. To Kautsky, Bernstein communicated Engels's demand for a democratic republic. Like Engels, Bernstein wanted stronger identification with workers in other countries, and he opposed placing all non-proletarian classes together. He expressed Engels's concern that social democrats be more cautious with the idea of worker misery. Throughout this period Bernstein served as Kautsky's liaison to Engels.<sup>8</sup>

When Kautsky decided to attempt an alternative proposal to the executive committee's draft, Bernstein provided further aid. Bernstein felt that it would be too time-consuming to write a new program together, so he suggested that Kautsky compose one section and himself the other. Kautsky chose the first, theoretical part. Drawing upon the 24th chapter of *Capital* volume one, he portrayed what he understood to be the developmental tendencies of capitalist society and their consequences: Capital development leading to large-scale production

<sup>7</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 723-730, 749-758, and 780-791. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 96f.; Gilcher-Holtey, pp. 65f. Summary and commentary on Kautsky's differences from the July draft are in Gilcher-Holtey, pp. 67-74.

For the sake of brevity, in background sections of this work some footnote references to articles in the primary periodical materials provide only source, volume, and page number.

<sup>8</sup>See Eduard Bernstein, *Ferdinand Lassalle as a Social Reformer* (New York, 1969), Eleanor Marx Aveling, tr.; this is a reprint of the London 1893 edition, a translation of Bernstein's 1891 introduction, with some changes. *Neue Zeit*, IXa (1890-91), 294-298, 337-343, 369-375, 503-509, 529-535, 600-605. EB-KK June 26, 1891; EB-KK July 10, 1891. On necessary impoverishment, see Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 90.

destroyed small-scale; laborers lost their tools and other means of production, which were monopolized by the capitalist and the large landowner. While the latter profited from the great increase in productivity which accompanied large-scale industry, the proletariat and the falling middle classes faced insecurity, suffering, and exploitation. Only when capitalist private property in the means of production became social property and when commodity production became socialist production could industrialization benefit the oppressed. According to Kautsky, the transformation would help all who suffered under the present conditions, but only the working class could accomplish it since all other classes rested on private property. The proletariat's struggle was necessarily a political one. To make this struggle conscious and unified constituted the task of the social-democratic party. Bernstein chose the program's second part consisting of immediate demands—that is, reforms which would strengthen the proletariat for the class struggle and which were compatible with a market economic system and a democratic republic. These demands included the popular election of government officials; parliamentary control of the budget; universal and equal suffrage with a secret ballot; a militia in place of the army; freedom of speech, organization, and assembly; separation of church and state; secularization of public schools with mandatory education through the fourteenth year; a graduated income tax; and thorough factory regulation including the legal eight-hour work day.<sup>9</sup>

Bernstein liked Kautsky's section of the program, and he agreed with Kautsky's three *Neue Zeit* articles which explained it while also criticizing ideas in the July draft. Bernstein then wrote a fourth article clarifying his section on immediate demands. Because of their complete agreement, Bernstein trusted Kautsky to change the fourth article. When Bebel later added the phrase "one reactionary mass" to their proposal, Bernstein joined Kautsky in again opposing this Lassallean concept.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>EB-KK July 10, 1891. *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 825-827. Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 61. Gay, pp. 62-64, quotes and paraphrases Kautsky's section of the program.

<sup>10</sup>The relevant correspondence includes: EB-KK September 7, 1891; EB-KK September 11, 1891; EB-KK September 26, 1891; EB-KK October 3, 1891; KK-EB October 9, 1891; EB-KK October 12, 1891.

This battle between the mature interpretation of Marx held by Engels, Bernstein, and Kautsky and the populist socialism of Liebknecht climaxed at the Erfurt party congress, October 14 to 20, 1891. Though the former three achieved only a qualified success, there can be little question of the latter's defeat. Kautsky joined the program committee; and his draft was used for discussion. The phrase "one reactionary mass" was dropped. Despite the rejection of his proposal, Liebknecht had to present the committee report to the congress. Engels wrote to Friedrich Sorge on October 24,

Liebknecht had the bitter role of recommending Kautsky's program draft which, endorsed by Bebel and me, was taken as the foundation for the new program's theoretical part. We have the satisfaction that Marx's critique broke all the way through. -- Even the last remnants of Lassalleism are removed.

The Erfurt congress quickly adopted the committee's recommendation. But this was still not a total victory for Kautsky and Bernstein, for in the committee Kautsky had accepted several alterations. Two paragraphs were inserted in the first half, one suggesting intensifying overt class conflict and the other describing economic crises.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Engels to Sorge is in "Briefe über den Erfurter Parteitag," p. 1003. See also the letters of Engels to Kautsky on September 28 and December 3, 1891, in "Briefe über den Erfurter Parteitag," pp. 999 and 1005. Bernstein congratulated Kautsky on their victory in EB-KK November 5, 1891.

General descriptions of how the commission replaced the earlier draft with the one by Kautsky are found in a letter from Bebel to Engels on October 18, 1891, in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Engels*, pp. 455f.; and in a letter of Engels to Kautsky on December 3, 1891, in "Briefe über den Erfurter Parteitag," p. 1005. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 98f.; Lehmann, *Agarfrage*, p. 31; Gilcher-Holtey, pp. 66f. and 74-76. For alternative assessments of Kautsky's role in drafting the Erfurt Program see Gary P. Steenson, "Karl Kautsky and the Erfurt Program of 1891," in *Marxismus und Demokratie*, pp. 97-99.

An English translation of the Erfurt Program is included in Gary P. Steenson, *Not One Man! Not One Penny!": German Social Democracy, 1863-1914* (Pittsburgh, 1981), pp. 247-250.

#### D. Economic Determinism and Revolutionary Consciousness

The Erfurt Program and the writings associated with it, along with other books and articles by Kautsky and Bernstein from the early 1890's, embodied the understanding of Marxism at which they had arrived shortly before Engels's death. In his three *Neue Zeit* articles on the program drafts, Kautsky first criticized an earlier, utopian approach to socialism: Not recognizing evolutionary change in society itself, the utopians had attempted to draw an exact picture of the socialist future society. To realize this ideal they had turned to the philanthropic bourgeois, then to the state, to "the people," and finally to conspiratorial elites. According to Kautsky, this procedure involved serious mistakes--a cult of universal suffrage, a belief in direct democracy in place of parliament, and a failure to see that "the people" were such a heterogeneous group they could not act together to establish socialism. All these methods for erecting the socialist utopia failed. Direct democracy proved conservative; and changes in the nature of revolution thwarted conspiracy.<sup>1</sup>

Kautsky explained that from 1847 to 1867 Marx and Engels developed a radically different understanding of change--the materialist conception of history.

Here not merely were the laws of motion of the modern mode of production more deeply revealed than ever before, its laws of evolution were also recognized and disclosed. . . . *Capital* turned theoretical socialism into a distinct science which one can perhaps define as the study of the laws of evolution of modern society.

According to Kautsky, instead of envisioning a model to be imposed upon society from without, Marx and Engels analyzed change within society itself, the class struggle. There was no model to be implemented by a dictatorial elite; rather, there was one social structure evolving into another. Kautsky claimed, "Whoever achieves knowledge

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<sup>1</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 724-730, 751, 753, 790, and 816. Criticism of what Kautsky considered the bourgeois need for a utopia is found in Karl Kautsky, *Das Erfurter Programm. In seinem grundsätzlichen Teil erläutert*, 2nd. ed. (Stuttgart, 1892), pp. 134-136. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 67 and 79.



of the laws of evolution of today's society sees that this society creates its negation, socialism, not only as an idea but also in reality."<sup>2</sup>

Kautsky believed that in a way analogous to the laws of nature, laws governed this historical process. Human beings might cooperate with these laws, helping the change to occur; or they might act against them; but the laws would govern nonetheless. These laws could affect most aspects of human existence because alterations in the social-economic or material conditions (the Basis) ultimately determined changes in politics, law, and intellectual life (the Superstructure). Engels wrote in 1883, "Economic production and the structure of society of every historical epoch necessarily arising therefrom constitute the foundation for the political and intellectual history of that epoch."<sup>3</sup>

Yet, if objective laws govern social change and if social environment molds intellectual life, then how can the decisions of individual human beings influence history? It might seem that Engels excluded human will from the historical process. Such a theory of direct and absolute social-economic determinism would face major problems. While rejecting the conspiratorial elite with its ideal for society, it would appear to imply a new ruling elite of social scientists with knowledge of the historical laws. Such a materialism, as much as the idealism of the utopians, could threaten political freedom.<sup>4</sup>

However, without abandoning historical laws and determinism, Engels insisted that human consciousness and will did cause change. For Engels there could be objective historical laws because individual persons possessed consciousness and will. Because human thought was shaped by material conditions, it could form a link in the unbroken chain of historical causality.

<sup>2</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 749. On Bernstein and utopianism, see Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 375.

<sup>3</sup>The quotation from Engels is in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 334. It resembles Marx's famous Preface to his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859; see *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 4f. In his Foreword to the 1897 edition (Stuttgart, 1897), p. vi, Kautsky called this Preface a "classic formulation" of Marx's theory.

<sup>4</sup>See Ludwig Landgrebe, "Hegel und Marx," *Marxismusstudien*, I (1954), 50f., on anti-democratic implications of a theory of objective laws determining social change.

Engels's clarified his position in correspondence of the early 1890's. Writing to Joseph Bloch on September 21 and 22, 1890, Engels explained,

. . . history is made in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, of which each again has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life. Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant--the historical event. This may again itself be viewed as the product of a power which works as a whole, unconsciously and without volition. For what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one willed. Thus past history proceeds in the manner of a natural process and is essentially subject to the same laws of motion. But from the fact that individual wills . . . do not attain what they want, but are merged into a collective mean, a common resultant, it must not be concluded that their value is equal to zero. On the contrary, each contributes to the resultant and is to this degree involved in it.

Engels emphasized that material conditions were determining only in the last instance, that many elements of human intellectual life affected history:

According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the Basis, but the various elements of the Superstructure: political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas, also exercise their

influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.<sup>5</sup>

In a letter to Conrad Schmidt on October 27, 1890, Engels described how elements of the Superstructure could assume an existence somewhat independent of the social-economic Basis and in turn could alter it. Take law for example:

In a modern state, law must not only correspond to the general economic condition and be its expression, but must also be an internally coherent expression which does not, owing to inner contradictions, reduce itself to naught. And in order to achieve this, the faithful reflection of economic conditions suffers increasingly.

Engels added,

And it seems to me obvious that this inversion, which, so long as it remains unrecognized, forms what we call ideological conception, reacts in its turn upon the economic Basis and may, within certain limits, modify it.

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<sup>5</sup>*The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 640f. Gustafsson, pp. 42f., and Alfred Schmidt, "Historischer Materialismus in den späten Arbeiten von Engels," in *Friedrich Engels 1820-1970. Referate, Diskussionen, Dokumente*, Hans Pelger, ed. (Bonn - Bad Godesberg, 1971), p. 224, summarize Engels's analysis. Compare *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 656, an excerpt from Engels's 1884 work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

The secondary literature on the question of Engels and determinism is extensive. A number of studies are included in the bibliography. Scholars arguing that Engels did allow for human subjectivity bringing about historical events include Eric Hahn, Alfred Kosing, Waldtraut Opitz, Vladimir Ruml, and Boris A. Tschagin. See also Lucio Colletti, *Bernstein und der Marxismus der Zweiten Internationale*, Heimke Barratte and Lu Haas, trs. (Frankfurt/M., 1971), pp. 25-29; Hans-Jörg Sandkühler, "Die Entwicklung des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus aus dem Kapital-Verhältnis. Zum Determinismus-Problem in der Arbeiterbewegung," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, pp. 244-249; and Mayer, II, 319f.

Hence Engels could conclude,

If therefore Barth supposes that we deny any and every reaction of the political, etc., reflexes of the economic movement upon the movement itself, he is simply tilting at windmills. He has only got to look at Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, which deals almost exclusively with the particular part played by political struggles and events; of course, within their general dependence upon economic conditions. Or *Capital*, the section on the working day, for instance, where legislation, which is surely a political act, has such a trenchant effect. Or the section on the history of the bourgeoisie (Chapter XXIV). Or why do we fight for the political Dictatorship of the Proletariat if political power is economically impotent? Force (that is, state power) is also an economic power!<sup>6</sup>

Then on July 14, 1893, Engels wrote Franz Mehring,

Otherwise there is only one point lacking, which, however, Marx and I always failed to stress enough in our writings and in regard to which we are all equally guilty. That is to say, we all laid, and were bound to lay, the main emphasis, in the first place, on the derivation of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of actions arising through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But in so doing we neglected the formal side—the ways and means by which these notions, etc., came about—for the sake of content. This has given our adversaries a welcome opportunity for misunderstandings and distortions, of which Paul Barth is a striking example.<sup>7</sup>

In this way Engels argued that historical events were the result of individual human wills and that while human thought in the Superstructure was ultimately determined by the social-economic Basis, elements in the Superstructure could change autonomously up to a

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<sup>6</sup>*The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 645-647. See also Gustafsson, pp. 44-50.

<sup>7</sup>*The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 648.



point, affect one another, and alter the Basis itself. Engels admitted that he and Marx had been neglectful not to describe more fully the complex relationships underlying ideological factors.<sup>8</sup>

Essentially, Kautsky and Bernstein shared Engels's view of historical change, as they understood it. On the one hand, they denied that revolutions could simply be made at will. Instead, revolutions were products of a determined social-economic evolution. In their way of thinking, historical materialism was a method for analyzing this past and current process, not a dogmatic prediction of how things would occur in the future. Kautsky compared the utopians' dreaming to attempting to write a history of a future war. There was no point in sketching detailed arrangements of the future state or in trying to realize such visions by an act of mere will. Hence there was no place for a conspiratorial elite or a sudden and violent social transformation.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Kautsky and Bernstein repeatedly denied that the laws governing history were identical to those of the non-conscious, natural world. They questioned any form of social-Darwinism applying laws of nature directly to humankind. Kautsky warned, "To want to prove the necessity of socialism not through specific historical conditions but through a law of nature is anything but Marxist." To Kautsky, it was wrong to claim that Marxism was fatalistic, denying a historical role to human consciousness and will. He complained,

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<sup>8</sup>Comments on Engels's attitude toward economic determinism in the 1890's correspondence are included in Gustafsson, pp. 36-41 and 51f.; Gneuss, "Um den Einklang von Theorie und Praxis," *Marxismusstudien*, II (1957), 207f.; and Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 101f.

<sup>9</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 753 and 755; Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 139f. That social alteration necessarily followed change in the manner of production was explained in *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 3 and 117. That the party's principles were not dogma was argued in *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 557. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 100. In 1891 Engels published Marx's *The Civil War in France*, in which Marx stressed the non-utopian nature of the working class in 1871, focusing on the need for long-term social processes which would transform society and form the proletariat; see *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 558.

One has accused this teaching of leading to fatalism and has accordingly spoken of the danger of Marxism. The real Marxist danger are those people who call themselves Marxists who do not know what Marx taught. If there were ever a doctrine incompatible with fatalism, it is Marxism. This does indeed teach that the direction of social evolution cannot be willfully determined but rather is given with necessity; but it also teaches that the motive force of this evolution is the struggle of contradictions, the class struggle.

Bernstein maintained that their emphasis on the subjective differentiated Marxists from economic liberalism, for which social progress resulted naturally from technological innovation. In reply to the economist Gerhart von Schulze-Gävernitz, Bernstein insisted that Engels had recognized for ideas an active part in history. In Bernstein's opinion, Marxism did not neglect the role of idea and will in historical change.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>*Neue Zeit*, XIIIa (1894-95), 710; *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 750. *Neue Zeit*, XIa (1892-93), 782; *Neue Zeit*, IXa (1890-91), 668f.; Bernstein, *Der Sozialismus einst und jetzt*, 2nd. ed. (Berlin, 1923), pp. 8f. See also *Neue Zeit*, IXa (1890-91), 171; *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 532; *Neue Zeit*, Xb (1892), 136; *Neue Zeit*, XIIb (1894), 68f.; and Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 106 and 140f.

Bernstein approved Kautsky's article, "Darwinismus und Marxismus," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIa (1894-95), 709-716, in which Kautsky opposed the direct application of laws of nature to human society; EB-KK February 18, 1895.

On Bernstein see Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 243f. On Kautsky see Holzheuer, pp. 70-74; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 5f., 63f., 69f., 237f., and 265 note 48; Reinhold Hünlich, "Gab es einen Kautskyanismus," pp. 47-56; Wolfgang Abendroth, *Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Frankfurt/M., 1964), pp. 36f.; and Dick Geary, *Karl Kautsky* (Manchester, 1987), pp. 25 and 92. On both see Harold Koth, "Der subjektive Faktor in Theorie und Praxis bei Karl Kautsky und Eduard Bernstein (1890-1896)," *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung*, XVI (1984), 267, according to whom Bernstein in 1894 emphasized the historical role of subjective factors more than Kautsky did. See also Dick Geary, "Marx and the Natural Sciences:

In brief, Kautsky and Bernstein subscribed to a view of history in which social evolution came about via the alternating of material and ideal elements, i.e., through the interaction of social-economic Basis and ideological Superstructure. Technological progress occurred, generating change in the social structure (Basis). Such ideological factors (Superstructure) as law, morals, economic theory, and politics failed to keep up with the change. Out of the accompanying class conflict, there grew a political revolution to bring the Superstructure into accord with the new Basis. Kautsky explained,

Confusion in this area has been greatly increased by the fact that one uses the same name "revolution" for two different things: on the one hand a process which for the most part can occur unnoticed, the total restructuring of all social relationships; and on the other hand an obvious catastrophe caused by the former process once the incompatibility of the altered social relationships with the continuing juridical and political structures, which the new social relationships more and more contradict, becomes so unbearable for the exploited classes that these are driven to force a break with these juridical and political structures.

However, the relationships constituting the material Basis were not of equal importance. Developing economic relations formed the motive force of history. Other social relationships could fall behind, much as the Superstructure did. These other elements of the Basis might also need to be brought into agreement with the economic relations. The ideological Superstructure would mediate between two aspects of the material Basis. Kautsky summarized,

Already in the forties of this century, Marx and Engels showed us (and from then on every advance in social science has confirmed) that in the last instance human history is not determined by the ideas of human beings but rather by economic development, which irresistibly advances according to specific laws and not according to people's wishes and whims. We have seen . . . how this proceeds, how it creates new forms of production which necessitate new social

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The Case of Karl Kautsky," *Internationale Tagung der Historiker der Arbeiterbewegung*, XIX (Sonderkonferenz 1983), 401-409.

structures; how it generates new needs which force people to reflect on their social relationships and to think up means to adapt the society to the new conditions of production. For this adaptation does not occur on its own; it needs the mediation of the thinking human head, ideas. Without thought, without ideas there is no progress. But ideas are merely the mediator of social progress; the first impulse toward this does not come from them, the way people thought earlier and many still think, rather from the change in economic relationships.<sup>11</sup>

In the theory of Kautsky and Bernstein, human consciousness and will permeated both Basis and Superstructure. They profoundly affected the Basis—for example, when science contributed to technological advance. Human consciousness and will were dramatically apparent in the political revolution, to be carried out by the proletariat. Kautsky emphasized,

When we say that the end of private property in the means of production is inevitable, we do not mean by this that one fine day the roasted pigeons of the social revolution will fly into the mouths of the exploited without their acting. We hold the collapse of the present society to be inevitable because we know that economic development begets with natural necessity conditions which force the exploited to fight against this private property, that it increases the number and power of the exploited and decreases the number and power of the exploiters clinging to the status quo, that it finally leads to unbearable conditions for the mass of the population leaving them only the choice between passive decay and active overthrow of the existing property system.

Hence it seems unlikely that Kautsky was professing a Darwinian determinism or historical fatalism when he composed his famous words:

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<sup>11</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 753; Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, p. 138. Hans-Jürgen Waldschmidt, *Lenin und Kautsky. Verschiedene Wege der Weiterentwicklung des Marxismus* (Würzburg, 1966), pp. 15 and 30f.; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 204f.



Social democracy is a revolutionary but not a revolution-making party. We know that our goals can be reached only through a revolution, but we also know that it is as little within our power to carry out the revolution as it is in the power of our opponents to prevent it. Hence it does not even occur to us to want to incite or prepare a revolution.

For Kautsky neither the SPD, nor some group of utopian conspirators, nor a school of social scientists armed with the historical laws could make a revolution. Rather, the proletariat would do so.<sup>12</sup> And the workers with their allies would constitute the majority in an industrial nation. If the socialist revolution had been idealistic, the mere will of an elite, then socialism might be dictatorial. In Kautsky's thought, the revolution could be democratic because it was determined by material conditions.

<sup>12</sup>Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, p. 106. *Neue Zeit*, XIIa (1893-1894), 368; also quoted in Massimo Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution 1880-1938*, Jon Rothschild, tr. (New York, 1979), p. 40.

Holzheuer, pp. 39f. and 64-68; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 210 and 249-251; John Hans Kautsky, "The Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 51, 58-64, and 188-191; Salvadori, pp. 27f.; Gilcher-Holtey, pp. 83-88; and Marek Waldenberg, "Kautskys Marx-Rezeption," p. 39. On Rosa Luxemburg and the proletariat, see Dick Howard, "Introduction," to *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, Dick Howard, ed. (New York, 1971), p. 16.

### E. The Democratic Republic

Based on their materialist conception of history--a social-economic determinism which still allowed an active role for human consciousness--Kautsky and Bernstein thought that two profound changes would need to occur before socialism could be reached: The proletariat must take political power and then use that power to open the way for the evolution of capitalism into socialism. Since both political and social transformations would be the achievement of the proletariat, its maturing into a class-conscious and revolutionary force was of utmost importance. The unity of the Erfurt Program lay in this concern. Part One described the material conditions under capitalism which first created the proletariat and then began giving it a revolutionary will. Part Two listed reforms which would expedite the development of the proletariat within the capitalist economy.<sup>1</sup>

Should all the reforms of Part Two have been achieved, Germany would in effect have become a democratic republic. Engels, Kautsky, and Bernstein knew that this form of state was possible under capitalism and that it could be dominated by the bourgeoisie. Engels referred to France and America as examples of democratic republics. Yet, the democratic republic constituted a key step in the total revolutionary process. They believed that it provided the best conditions for preparing the proletariat to rule and that in the future the democratic republic would be the state-form with which the proletariat would exercise power. In his 1891 "Critique" of Liebknecht's program draft, Engels declared, "If anything is certain it is that our party and the working class can come to power only in a

<sup>1</sup>The Program's unity is suggested in Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, p. 1. The need for two different kinds of revolution is suggested in *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 753. Wolfgang Abendroth, *Aufstieg und Krise*, pp. 28-33; Salvadori, p. 31; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 32f. and p. 39 note 26; Detlef Lehnert, "Die Rezeption Bernsteins in der 'linken' Kritik," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, p. 378; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 7f., 203-205, and 209; Peter Strutynski, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Marxisten und Revisionisten in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung um die Jahrhundertwende* (Cologne, 1976), p. 11; and Horst Bartel, "Die Durchsetzung des Marxismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung im letzten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, XIV (1966), 1364.

democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat."<sup>2</sup>

In a variety of contexts Kautsky and Bernstein emphasized the importance of the democratic republic for the maturing of the proletariat. The social-democratic party had important tasks of organization and education. But organization required the right of coalition in trade unions and in a political party; education required freedom of the press and of assembly. Kautsky avowed,

These freedoms are of the greatest significance for the working class; they belong to its necessities of life, to that which it absolutely needs in order to develop. They mean light and air for the proletariat.

To Kautsky, training laborers for eventual political rule called for involving them in self-government at all levels, from town councils and insurance boards to the Reichstag (imperial parliament). He stressed the need for true parliamentary government—for a responsible executive under legislative control of taxes and the budget. To him,

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<sup>2</sup>*Marx-Engels Werke*, XXII, 234f. Richard N. Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels* (Pittsburgh, 1974 and 1984), II, 64 and 73. According to Bartel, "Karl Kautsky," p. 430, already in the 1880's Engels had stressed to Bernstein and Bebel the importance of the bourgeois republic.

The issue is debated. Some historians contrast the idea of a democratic republic to any bourgeois republic. They point to the criticism of the bourgeois republic found in Marx's or Engels's writings on the French Revolution of 1848 or on the Paris Commune. Bourgeois state institutions were to be destroyed, not taken over, by the proletariat. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat would be different yet. See, for example, Rolf Dhubek, "Die Konkretisierung der Konzeption der sozialistischen Revolution im späten Schaffen von F. Engels (1883-1895)," *Beiträge*, XXII (1980), 803-819 and XXIII (1981), 51-67 and 218-237. Other historians believe that early social democrats imagined the democratic republic under proletarian rule to be liberal and democratic in the Western sense, unlike the bourgeois republics existing in the late nineteenth century in being more thoroughly democratic. Marx's or Engels's criticism of the bourgeois republic applied to the military and bureaucracy structures of specific governments of their day. See, for example, Gilcher-Holtey, p. 90.

the parliamentary form well suited the class struggle; and to the extent that he was critical of existing parliamentary regimes, it was that they needed to become more democratic. Under a democratic and liberal constitution, it was more likely that the workers could take control legally and peacefully as industrialization made them the majority of the population.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, in the event of a political catastrophe throwing the social democrats into power, they would need to establish a democratic republic.

In the mid-1890's Kautsky was coming to understand the Dictatorship of the Proletariat to mean working-class majority-rule in a democratic republic with a mixed economy. For him "democratic republic" denoted a particular state form, one with which different classes might rule—first the bourgeoisie and then the proletariat. In contrast, "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" referred to rule by the working class, and rule by the entire proletarian class called for a democratic republic. In Kautsky's understanding, a democratic republic under proletarian control would no longer be a state in the strict sense—that is, a state in the Lassalleian or Hegelian sense of being over and above the people. It would instead be rule by the working class, the majority of the people. In 1891 Engels published Marx's *The Civil War in France* with an introduction portraying democratic features

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<sup>3</sup>Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, p. 219; also quoted in Salvadori, p. 35. *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 217f., 220, 225; and *Neue Zeit*, XIIa (1893-94), 402f.

Waldschmidt, pp. 87-98 and 106f.; John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 44-50, 143f., and 147f.; John Hans Kautsky, "Introduction," to Karl Kautsky, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (Ann Arbor, 1964), p. vi; Salvadori, pp. 11f., 15f., and 35-37; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 9 and 205f.; Geary, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 18f.; and Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, pp. 203f.



of the Paris Commune and referring to the Commune as the best previous example of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Stenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 208f.; Gilcher-Holtey, pp. 73f.; John Hans Kautsky, "Introduction," pp. xviif., xix, and xxii; John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 344-349 and 364-371. Kautsky's faith in democratic parliamentary government is also mentioned by Detlef Lehnert, *Reform und Revolution*, p. 102.

For further, contrasting views, see Jukka Gronow, *On the Formation of Marxism. Karl Kautsky's Theory of Capitalism, the Marxism of the Second International and Karl Marx's Critique of Political Economy* (Helsinki, 1986), p. 134; and Dieter Schuster, "Kautsky," in *Sowjetsystem und demokratische Gesellschaft. Eine vergleichende Enzyklopädie* (Freiburg, 1969), III, 604.

Engels's portrayal of democratic aspects of the Paris Commune is in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 535-537; Marx's depicting democratic characteristics for it is in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 559-563. Whether their descriptions of the Commune were historically accurate is a separate issue, of course. See also John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 344-349.

#### F. Worker Impoverishment, Capital Concentration, and the Catastrophe

Perceiving the proletariat under capitalism as gradually becoming prepared for future rule contradicted a belief supposedly widespread among socialists--the necessary impoverishment of the workers. The notion of an "iron law of wages" would seem to imply necessary impoverishment. At Halle in 1890 Liebknecht criticized the Gotha Program for including the "iron law." Shortly thereafter the economist Lujo Brentano doubted Liebknecht's honesty because allegedly Marx, as much as Lassalle, had believed in the "iron law." In a series of articles, Bernstein insisted that the idea belonged to Lassalle, not Marx. It rested on the wage fund concept of classical bourgeois economics combined with Malthus's population theory; and it was wrong for both reasons, in Bernstein's opinion. In any case, it was not Marxist. Marxism allowed that labor unions, social legislation, and free trade could make a difference for the workers. Engels wrote Liebknecht in 1891: "The organization of the workers, their continuously growing resistance can possibly erect a dam against the increase of misery. What certainly grows is the insecurity of life."<sup>1</sup>

In his *Neue Zeit* program articles, Kautsky employed a similar argument:

It is correct that the present mode of production possesses the tendency to increase the misery of the lower elements of

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<sup>1</sup>*Marx-Engels Werke*, XXII, 231; also quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 37 note 21. *Neue Zeit*, IXa (1890-91), 294f., 298, 531, and 604f.; commentary is found in Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, pp. 131f. In his "Critique of the Gotha Program" Marx criticized Lassalle's "iron law of wages"; *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 391f. Gay, p. 91, briefly describes the "iron law of wages." On Engels's opposition to a theory of necessarily increasing misery see Gneuss, "Um den Einklang," pp. 208f.; Gneuss, "Historische und ideologische Voraussetzungen," p. 79; and Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 89f. On Marx see Colletti, *Bernstein*, pp. 68-70.

Apparently, Bax accepted the "iron law." See his *Outlooks From the New Standpoint* (London, 1891), p. 99. See also Henry Collins, "The Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation," in *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923*, Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds. (Archon Books, 1971), pp. 52f., who describes the SDF's ignorance of Marx on this issue.

the population--the falling middle classes as well as the proletariat. But with a natural necessity equal to that leading to misery, this mode of production also gives rise to rebellion against misery, a rebellion which swells stronger and stronger, which provides more and more energetic resistance against the tendency in capitalism to degrade people, which under exceptionally favorable conditions even succeeds in turning the workers' living standard from falling to rising.

According to Kautsky, workers opposed not only the low wages but also the instability of their employment. Moreover, Kautsky recognized relative impoverishment:

This revolutionary and revolutionary-making character of the existing mode of production increases more and more, and likewise the conflict between the capitalist and proletarian classes. For even where the situation of the latter is improving absolutely, it falls relatively in that the improvement remains behind the rapid increase in the general productivity of labor, which characterizes our mode of production. Even where misery becomes less, exploitation increases.

Kautsky further understood the tendency toward impoverishment as affecting society as a whole, not just the proletariat. Even while wage rates held firm, members of the middle classes would lose their businesses. Though becoming factory workers might raise their standard of living, for some it could bring loss of pride and hence an emotional impoverishment. Because capitalism brought women and children into the factories, the working-class family's income could remain the same despite a fall in wage rates.<sup>2</sup>

The tendency toward worker impoverishment under capitalism was for Kautsky, as for Engels and Bernstein, only a tendency. Kautsky would later explain of his commentary on the Erfurt Program,

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<sup>2</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 753f. Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 26, 28f., 39, and 241. Compare Kautsky, "Vorrede zur fünften Auflage (1904)" in Kautsky, *Das Erfurter Programm. In seinem grundsätzlichen Teil erläutert*, introduction by Susanne Miller (Hanover, 1964), pp. xxif.; this is a reprint of the 1922 edition. John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 110-116.

All the critics of the "impoverishment theory" and the "catastrophe theory" have not moved me to change one iota, this simply because in my work it was a matter of neither the one nor the other of these "theories." These are theories which several years after the writing of the Erfurt Program were read into it despite many protests.

It was precisely the battle against impoverishment, through trade-union organization and political participation, that prepared the proletariat for taking power in the future. Utopian socialists or anarchists might specify that the well-being of the workers must decline before the revolution would be possible, but not Marxists.<sup>3</sup>

For Kautsky, the tendency of capital to concentrate and to centralize, eliminating the middle classes and many capitalists until only the proletariat remained facing a few capitalists, was powerful. Still, he allowed that the workers might well conquer political power before capital had expropriated all the middle classes (craftsmen and peasants). Economic crises which sped this capital development might assume new forms, and a fall in the rate of profit need not mean a collapse.<sup>4</sup>

Among German socialists in the 1890's, the concepts of worker impoverishment, capital concentration, and economic crises were intertwined with that of a general collapse, the *Zusammenbruch*. For example, some believed that the underconsumption imposed on the proletariat led to an artificial overproduction resulting in economic crises and eventually in political catastrophe. Few ideas were so important in the Revisionist Controversy as that of the *Zusammenbruch*. Yet, socialists in the late nineteenth century held quite different understandings of this concept, perhaps without fully realizing it.<sup>5</sup> Our appreciation of the quandary can be helped by our making four distinctions: between the *Zusammenbruch* and the proletarian revolution, between the collapse as historically necessary or as contingent, between the catastrophe being expected before the

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<sup>3</sup>Karl Kautsky, "Vorrede zur fünften Auflage (1904)," pp. xx-xxii. Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 236-238. John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 118-121.

<sup>4</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 782f. and 784; Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 28, 75f., and 150-153.

<sup>5</sup>See also Gay, p. 184.



proletarian conquest of power or only in the distant future if the workers did not act, and between cyclical business crises as a sign of capitalist failure or as one unfortunate characteristic of a viable economy.

First, and most importantly, the Zusammenbruch need not be the proletarian revolution. The former involved the collapse of the old order without the initiative of the working class and perhaps even against its wishes. The proletarian revolution, in contrast, would be the deliberate conquest of political power by the workers, grown strong within the capitalist system. At the Erfurt party congress Bebel had confidently assumed that a Zusammenbruch would almost automatically bring worker control. After the collapse, socialists would simply pick up the pieces. But in a letter to Bebel later that month, Engels worried that in the event of a war placing social democrats in control, the new government might lack support from the technically educated. Is there not an implicit distinction here between a collapse of the old order and the proletariat's ability to exercise power?<sup>6</sup>

Second, there was the question of historical necessity. On the one hand, socialists like Ernest Belfort-Bax pictured bourgeois society collapsing because of its own internal economic and social contradictions. The very structure of capitalism (its Basis) was illogical and therefore doomed. On the other hand, Engels and Bebel foresaw a more accidental catastrophe in which bourgeois society would fail to meet a threat external to its own inner structure (a problem in the Superstructure): perhaps a poor political response to an exceptionally bad business crisis, a foreign war, a loss of nerve by the ruling classes.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Bebel's speech at Erfurt is included in August Bebel, *Politik als Theorie und Praxis. Ausgewählte Texte aus Reden und Schriften*, Albrecht Langner, ed. (Köln, 1967), pp. 53-92. It is also found in *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Erfurt vom 14. bis 20. Oktober 1891* (Berlin, 1891), p. 172; and is quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 37. Engels to Bebel on October 26, 1891, in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Engels*, p. 465. Reinhold Hünlich, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 58; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 250f.

<sup>7</sup>For one example of SDF thought on the collapse, see below, 171. See Engels to Sorge on October 24, 1891, in "Briefe über den Erfurter Parteitag," pp. 1003f. Non-economic indicators of a collapse included the rising socialist vote, antagonism between nobility and

Bebel preferred the term "Kladderadatsch," perhaps suggesting this fortuitous quality. In the late 1870's and 1880's Bebel's anticipation of an imminent collapse rested not on the theory of historical materialism but rather on observation of the ailing German economy. In 1891 Engels and Bebel discussed the possibility of social democrats coming to power in the event of war. In 1892 Bebel claimed that state officials and bourgeois (certainly no Marxists) agreed that the political and economic systems were failing.<sup>8</sup> Of course, for Marxism the conscious

bourgeoisie, and the armaments race. Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Friedrich Engels' revolutionäre Strategie nach dem Fall des Sozialistengesetzes," in *Friedrich Engels 1820-1970*, p. 117; and Gerhard Schulz, "Eduard Bernstein und die marxistische Theorie," in *Das Zeitalter der Gesellschaft*, Gerhard Schulz, ed. (Munich, 1969), p. 206.

<sup>8</sup>Expressions by Bebel of his expectation of imminent collapse are found in August Bebel, *Speeches, Voices of Revolt*, Vol. VI, Foreword by Kurt Kersten (New York, 1928), pp. 32f.; August Bebel, *Politik als Theorie und Praxis*, pp. 84f.; and in Bebel to Engels on July 12, 1891, in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Engels*, p. 424. In his *Aus den Jahren*, p. 105, Bernstein recalled Bebel's pessimistic assessment of the economy in the 1880's; also cited in Helmut Hirsch, "Einleitung," to *Ein revisionistisches Sozialismusbild. Drei Vorträge von Eduard Bernstein*, Helmut Hirsch, ed. (Hanover, 1966), p. 17.

Gilcher-Holtey, p. 54; Gay, p. 19; Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 18; Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie nach dem Fall des Sozialistengesetzes. Ideologie und Taktik der sozialistischen Massenpartei im Wilhelminischen Reich," in *Sozialdemokratie zwischen Klassenbewegung und Volkspartei. Verhandlungen der Sektion "Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung" des Deutschen Historikertages in Regensburg, Oktober 1972*, Hans Mommsen, ed. (Frankfurt/M., 1974), pp. 57f.; and William H. Mael, *August Bebel. Shadow Emperor of the German Workers* (Philadelphia, 1981), pp. 165-168, 175f., and 179. In his book, ". . . aber nach der Sündflut kommen wir und nur wir." "Zusammenbruchstheorie", *Marxismus und politisches Defizit in der SPD 1890-1914* (Frankfurt/M., 1981), Rudolf Walther provides a comprehensive study of the Zusammenbruch idea. On p. 52 he maintains that there was a difference between Bebel's picture of collapse and the one of Engels. Lehnert, *Reform und Revolution*, pp. 71-82. On p. 39 Lehnert argues that there was a difference between a fully developed Zusammenbruchstheorie and Engels's allowing that a general collapse might

proletarian revolution remained historically necessary, whether the collapse was or not.

Third, there was the question whether or not the Zusammenbruch was imminent or, in effect, the question whether the collapse would arrive before the proletarian revolution. Rosa Luxemburg, for example, believed that theoretically capitalism if left to itself would eventually fall of its own internal contradictions but that the proletariat would deliberately carry out a revolution first. In contrast, Bax anticipated the imminent catastrophe and wished to avoid delay of its arrival. Also in contrast, Engels and Bebel expected an imminent Kladderadatsch, but they would not encourage it, and at times Engels feared that it might happen too soon. Much of Bebel's political strategy rested on his conviction that the collapse was near and that the workers must be organized, united, independent of other classes, and prepared to assume power.<sup>9</sup>

Our combining the distinctions of necessary vs. contingent and of imminent vs. distant gives us four different understandings of the Zusammenbruch: historically necessary and imminent (Bax), theoretically necessary in the distant future though the proletarian revolution would occur first (Luxemburg), imminent but historically contingent (Engels and Bebel), and neither necessary nor imminent as far as anyone could foresee. Again, the collapse should not be

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accompany a severe business crisis. See also Fritz Weber, "Rosa Luxemburg und der Zusammenbruch des Kapitalismus," in *Neuere Studien zur Arbeitergeschichte. Zum fünfundsingzigjährigen Bestehen des Vereins für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, Helmut Konrad and Wolfgang Maderthaner, eds. (Vienna, 1984), I, 106f.

<sup>9</sup>Hans-Christoph Schröder, *Sozialistische Imperialismusdeutung. Studien zur ihrer Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1973), pp. 18f.

On Luxemburg's understanding of capitalism's having a theoretical endpoint which would not be reached because of prior proletarian revolution, see Weber, p. 110, or Gay, p. 185.

Engels to Bebel on October 26, 1891, in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Engels*, p. 465; and Engels to Sorge on October 24, 1891, in "Briefe über den Erfurter Parteitag," p. 1004.

On Bebel's political strategy see Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 60f. and 64; Steinberg, "Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie nach dem Fall," p. 8; Walther, pp. 52 and 80-82; and W. L. Guttsman, *The German Social Democratic Party 1875-1939* (London, 1981), p. 72.

confused with the proletarian revolution itself. One should remember that these four understandings are merely a classification schema suggested to help comprehend the historical material. They were not sharply differentiated at the time. The same person could make statements falling into several categories or combining categories. For example, when one identified the Kladderadatsch with the transformation of capitalism into socialism, then escalating political tension would imply that the economy had reached an advanced stage of development. Or when one associated the collapse with the workers' conquest of political power, then to doubt the imminent catastrophe would seem to deny the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Possibilities for socialists to misunderstand one another were rife.

Finally, what about cyclical business crises? Marx and Engels taught that crises formed an essential part of the capitalist system; and they predicted that crises would intensify. The question remained, however, whether Marx and Engels thought them to be the historically necessary overture to an historically necessary collapse or rather to be one aspect of a vigorous capitalism--concentrating capital, expanding the working class, and thereby preparing the way for the proletarian revolution. Apparently, Bax took the first approach, while Kautsky and Bernstein were unsure.<sup>10</sup>

In his 1892 Erfurt Program commentary Kautsky suggested that greater and more frequent crises would necessarily occur as capitalism conquered the world. Already, competition from capital in the colonies caused crises in Europe. But he did not advise the proletariat to wait to take power until after an historically necessary Zusammenbruch brought on by these crises. For Kautsky the possibility of collapse was a matter not of historical necessity but of empirical evidence, and Kautsky pictured the catastrophe more in terms of political confrontation than of economic failure. He later recalled,

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<sup>10</sup>Whether or not Marx and Engels foresaw business crises and economic collapse necessarily preceding proletarian revolution has long been debated. See Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 64 note 137; Hans-Christoph Schröder, *Sozialistische Imperialismusdeutung*, pp. 16 and 21f.; and also Hans-Christoph Schröder, *Sozialismus und Imperialismus*, 2nd. ed. (Bonn - Bad Godesberg, 1974), pp. 44-56. F. R. Hansen, *The Breakdown of Capitalism. A History of the Idea in Western Marxism, 1883-1983* (Boston, 1985), p. 4, distinguishes among theories of collapse, of crises, of business cycles, and of social revolution.



Precisely at the time of the Erfurt Program's origin, the probability was greater than today that in some countries the proletariat would conquer political power without catastrophe, for example in England. Marx himself admitted this possibility of peaceful development for England. When he did not believe in this possibility for the major states on the Continent, it was not because of some special catastrophe theory, but rather because of insight into the special character of state power in Continental Europe. But this did not require a catastrophe theory any more than observing the coming of a thunder storm requires a theory of storms.

Later in the Revisionist Controversy, when Bernstein attributed a Zusammenbruch theory to Marxism, Kautsky would deny it.<sup>11</sup>

In the early 1890's Kautsky and Bernstein were less certain than Engels and Bebel about the immediate prospects of the existing order. In *Neue Zeit* in 1891, Kautsky repeated Engels's view that economic crises might become more severe; but he also agreed that they might take on new forms; and so he chose to omit specific pronouncements about them from his program draft. In his 1892 commentary, Kautsky felt confident that cartels would not solve economic crises; but he did not insist that the cyclical crises would culminate in a final social and political catastrophe; instead, he described how they concentrated capital and increased the proletariat. In the early 1890's Kautsky and Bernstein conceded to Engels and Bebel that a collapse might happen. But its role in the revolutionary process was of less than central importance. Kautsky explained,

. . . when the motor of social revolution is the class struggle, a single catastrophe, no matter how powerful, can form only one single link in the long chain of development from the old

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<sup>11</sup>Kautsky, "Vorrede zur fünften Auflage," p. xxi. Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 99f. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 250; John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 99-107. Hünlich, "Gab es einen Kautskyanismus," p. 52; Gilcher Holtey, pp. 83 and 127f.; and Gay, p. 196.

into the new society, in no case the single link upon which the total attention of socialists is to be focused.<sup>12</sup>

In an 1893 article on participation in the Prussian diet (Landtag) elections, Bernstein questioned the assumption of Bebel and Engels that Germany faced an imminent catastrophe. Bernstein did not deny that there would be a collapse; indeed, he allowed that many signs indicated that bourgeois society was heading toward a Zusammenbruch. But he believed that one could neither predict the event nor force it to occur. Accordingly, the SPD should not make it the foundation of policy. Bernstein implied that the traditional social-democratic practice rested on the presupposition that bourgeois society would continue for some time. Kautsky fully approved Bernstein's argument. An imminent collapse, be it from economic or political causes, as the only possible end to capitalism apparently was not part of Marxism as they understood it in the early 1890's.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 753. *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 784; Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, p. 94. Geary, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 92; Hünlich, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 57-59.

<sup>13</sup>*Neue Zeit*, XIb (1893), 773f.; KK-EB September 21, 1893; EB-KK October 15, 1893; EB-KK November 23, 1893.

See below 51f.

Gustafsson, pp. 86f.; Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 28f.; Gerhard A. Ritter, "Die Sozialdemokratie im deutschen Kaiserreich in sozialgeschichtlicher Perspektive," *Historische Zeitschrift*, CCXLIX (1989), 306.

## G. Socialization, Reforms, and Political Cooperation

For Kautsky and Bernstein, the proletariat's experience under bourgeois rule in a democratic republic would prepare it for future political rule; and one future task of the proletariat would be to free the social-economic order to evolve further. Following the political revolution, the workers would inherit a capitalist economy from the bourgeoisie; and some initial reforms would improve that system, not destroy it, by abolishing pre-capitalist practices such as protective tariffs and subsidies for Junker landowners. Competition would eliminate inefficient firms and estates.<sup>1</sup> Next, the means of production and exchange would gradually be socialized, beginning with those enterprises most ready: railroads, mines, monopolies, trusts, and large-scale producers of mass consumer goods. The socialization process would be economically determined and in the common interest. To Kautsky and Bernstein, socialization did not imply nationalization with a large state bureaucracy; and it could mean municipal control or local cooperative production. Socialization applied only to the means of production and exchange; social democrats did not wish to collectivize consumer goods. The process would begin with the largest employers and slowly proceed downward. With the government backing the workers' demands and providing for the unemployed, capitalists would no longer enjoy great benefits from their enterprises. Kautsky envisioned owners wanting the government to buy their businesses.<sup>2</sup>

Since future material conditions would determine socialization, no one could predict exactly how it would occur, according to Kautsky and Bernstein. Social democrats could therefore have no utopian plan for the transition period as for a completed socialist economy; there existed no model to be realized suddenly and violently. The transition

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<sup>1</sup>Kautsky did not simply identify capitalism with a market economy. The market economy was the broader category, requiring market competition and at least some private ownership of the means of production. Capitalism implied both this and the widespread employment of wage labor.

<sup>2</sup>Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 148-151. KK-EB June 24, 1896; Kautsky, *Die soziale Revolution* (Berlin, 1902), Vol. II: "Am Tage nach der Revolution," p. 8; and later, 185. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 79f.; John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 396-400; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 221f.

to socialism should be peaceful and would in any case be legal, since the proletariat and its allies would constitute the majority in a democratic republic. Kautsky thought that while the socialization process slowly progressed, workers would still receive a wage and surviving capitalist firms should be permitted a profit; and he wanted compensation for former owners. He allowed that some self-employed producers might avoid socialization; and he hoped that peasants would be attracted voluntarily to join cooperatives, where they would enjoy the advantages of large-scale production. If in a democratic republic the advent of proletarian rule might be marked only by a social-democratic victory at the polls, the beginning of socialism under proletarian rule might be so gradual that the exact point of transition could not be seen.<sup>3</sup>

Reforms were important in the transition to socialism and at other times as well. Kautsky argued,

Every strengthening of the working class, be it through economic means or be it through political ones, signifies nothing else than a strengthening of the fighters for socialism. To do whatever possible to help the proletariat in its struggle to improve its living conditions is not only not irreconcilable with social-democratic principles; it is far more one of social democracy's most important tasks, perhaps the single most important one.

But reform work, like the role of violence in revolution, was ambiguous. Reforms could occur after the proletariat had taken political power, or within a democratic republic under bourgeois control, or even in the semi-absolutist monarchy of the Junkers. Under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat reform work would be all right; it would constitute part of the social revolution through which capitalism became socialism. Political reforms under a bourgeois republic might help complete liberal-democratic institutions; and social democrats fought for extension of the suffrage. Though Kautsky and Bernstein shared doubts about direct democracy and proportional

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<sup>3</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 634, 757, 780. Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 148, 150-152, and 158f. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 221f. and 226f.; John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 396-423.



representation, they championed parliamentary government. They also desired freedom of religion and removal of feudal privileges.<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to imagine that all the reforms of the Erfurt Program Part Two could have been fulfilled in Germany without a political revolution of some kind. Would the Junkers ever have allowed the legal equality of women or equal suffrage in Prussia, for example, let alone have accepted a militia in place of the standing army? Nonetheless, even under the Junker monarchy, social democrats found certain kinds of reforms well worth seeking. They favored labor legislation for a variety of reasons. It could help provide the workers with a higher quality of life, more leisure time for education, and better circumstances in general for developing as a class. Kautsky pointed out how Marx had endorsed such laws: "One of the chief tasks which the International under the influence of Marx set for itself lay in agitation for labor protection laws and in propagating trade unions on the Continent." The struggle for reforms provided the proletariat with political experience; it attracted new members to the social-democratic movement. At the very least, the government's refusal to grant reforms would convince the workers that proletarian rule was necessary. Bebel and Liebknecht countenanced reform work.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 754. *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 816-818, 820, and 826; *Neue Zeit*, XIb (1893), 516-527. John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," p. 249.

<sup>5</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 163. *Neue Zeit*, IXa (1890-91), 605; *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 753-755, 815, and 822; Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 107, 110, 204f. At Erfurt Bebel pointed out how people were attracted to the SPD by its reform work and that anarchists opposed reforms as delaying the revolution; in Bebel, *Politik als Theorie und Praxis*, pp. 62-65. The speech is also in *Protokoll Erfurt*, pp. 162-165.

Stenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 276 note 40; Tschubinski, pp. 206 and 246; Horst Bartel, "Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Marxismus und Revisionismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Beiträge*, XIX (1977), 200f. On Luxemburg and reform see J. Peter Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (New York, 1966), I, 212 and 224; Edward B. McLean, "Rosa Luxemburg's Revolutionary Socialism: A Study in Marxian Radicalism," Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1963, p. 119; and Fröhlich, pp. 51-53. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 88f.; and Helga Grebing and Monika Kramme, "Die Herausbildung

However, Engels, Bernstein, Kautsky, and others thought it impossible to establish socialism via reforms granted by a Junker or bourgeois state. Reforms obtained before the workers had won extensive political influence or control were not true socialism, but rather preconditions (*Voraussetzungen*) for the transitions to proletarian rule and then to socialism. For example, social democrats sought the legal eight-hour work day to fortify the proletariat in its class struggle; but they opposed immediate nationalization of the coal mines as supporting an oppressive government. Kautsky decided that he need not mention state socialism in his program draft because social democrats so clearly disapproved of it. For Engels, Bernstein, and Kautsky the key difference between socialization and nationalization was whether or not the proletariat exercised political power. The existing state remained an oppressive institution opposed to the working class; so they did not wish to strengthen it.<sup>6</sup>

Social democrats disliked state socialism for several reasons. It could help the state suppress the working class as a political movement for democracy, as the government had attempted under the Anti-Socialist Laws. State socialism could assist in defeating the workers economically, too, for example by relieving the tax burden on the bourgeois. One supposed that state socialism kept the proletariat from relying on its own organization and efforts, that it encouraged the

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des Revisionismus vor dem Hintergrund der Situation der deutschen Sozialdemokratie im Kaiserreich," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup>Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 129f.; *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 789. For Marx and Engels on the state see *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 393f., 397, and 652-654. The workers' hostile attitude toward the state, despite state assistance, is a source of complaint by the *Konservative Korrespondenz*, December 20, 1895, in LHAP 12984, Bl. 78. Steinberg, "Deutsche Sozialdemokratie nach dem Fall," pp. 52f.; Stenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 76; and Geary, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 34. Heinrich Gemkow, Horst Bartel, and others, *Friedrich Engels. Eine Biographie* (Berlin, 1970), p. 522; and E. G. Panfilow, "Die Aktualität der Kritik Friedrich Engels' an der Konzeption des 'Staatssozialismus' im gegenwärtigen ideologischen Kampf," in *Friedrich Engels—Mitbegründer des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus. Protokoll der internationalen wissenschaftlichen Konferenz anlässlich der 150. Wiederkehr des Geburtstages von Friedrich Engels* (Berlin, 1970), pp. 261-263.

belief that class antagonism could be overcome within capitalism, that it detracted from truly worthwhile reforms which strengthened the workers. Allegedly, state socialism taught them to depend on the central authority—hardly an appropriate attitude for self-government in a decentralized democratic republic. Finally, the Junker or bourgeois state could exploit its employees more severely than could a private firm.<sup>7</sup>

So one can appreciate the concern when in mid-1891 Georg von Vollmar, the Bavarian socialist leader, advocated state socialism. In his Eldorado Speeches in June and July and later in an 1892 article for the French socialist journal *Revue Bleue*, he proposed cooperation with the existing government. He welcomed Reich Chancellor Caprivi's "New Course" following the February Decrees of 1890, the social-democratic election victory that month, and the fall of the Anti-Socialist Laws. It was on precisely this political point, not the issue of reforms as such, that Kautsky replied against Vollmar in 1892, "Social democracy, in contrast, strives for socialization of the economic mechanism in a state whose power is in the service of the proletariat."<sup>8</sup>

At the Erfurt party congress Bebel argued that Vollmar overlooked what reforms were for: preparing the proletariat to take political power. This revolutionary goal made reform efforts part of the class struggle. The proposal to cooperate with the government and other classes was ill advised in face of collapse, which Bebel assumed was imminent. Vollmar disagreed. To his way of thinking, he had not abandoned social-democratic goals. The Reich would eventually become democratic even if the proletariat cooperated with the

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<sup>7</sup>*Neue Zeit*, Xb (1892), 708f. Salvadori, pp. 41 and 43; and Tschubinski, p. 284.

The increased difficulties faced by social-democratic organizers in state enterprises is reflected in a series of reports and correspondence in 1897 about the Prussian state railroads in Hamburg-Altona. ZSAP, Reichsamt des Innern, Nr. 13688, Bl. 2-52; and also ZSAP, Reichskanzlei, Nr. 647/1, Bl. 26-39.

<sup>8</sup>*Neue Zeit*, Xb (1892), 709. Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, pp. 87-89; Tschubinski, pp. 272, 275, and 282-285; Salvadori, p. 42; Rosen, pp. 58-66, 113-115, 122; and Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 65f. and 72f.

government; and capitalism would turn into socialism despite aid to small-scale production.<sup>9</sup>

The difference of Kautsky and Bernstein from Vollmar should be apparent. Though the first two hoped that there would occur a gradual transition from capitalism to socialism, they believed that it would happen under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, i.e., working-class political rule in a democratic republic. It was not just a matter of Kautsky and Bernstein focusing on the Prussian Junkers in North Germany while Vollmar supposed that he could cooperate with liberal-bourgeois provincial governments in the South.

It is particularly important to note that Bernstein refused Vollmar's reformism. Bernstein had long distrusted the state. He advocated those reforms demanded by the proletariat and suited to prepare it for future rule; and he approved limited nationalization in countries like Great Britain where the workers already had considerable political influence; but he opposed state socialism. Bernstein concurred with Kautsky's articles against Vollmar. He feared that state socialism could weaken the proletariat, slowing its advance toward maturity and self-government.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Bebel's attack on Vollmar is in Bebel, *Politik als Theorie und Praxis*, pp. 80-84. It is also found in *Protokoll Erfurt*, pp. 172-177.

The central issue of whether social democrats should cooperate with the existing government was mentioned in "Uebersicht über den Verlauf der sozialdemokratischen Bewegung in Deutschland seit der Aufhebung des Reichsgesetzes gegen die gemeingefährlichen Bestrebungen der Sozialdemokratie," p. 34 in ZSAP, Reichs-Justizamt, Nr. 6579/2, Bl. 29-35. The author of this official report thought that the government could agree with the social democrats on economic reforms but not on political ones.

Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, pp. 89-91; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 76; Helmut Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten, Opportunisten und die Bauern am Vorabend des Imperialismus* (Berlin, 1968), pp. 161-163; Gustafsson, pp. 23f.; Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 64; Holzheuer, pp. 46f.; and Salvadori, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup>EB-KK November 10, 1892. See also Hans Mommsen, "Nationalismus und nationale Frage," p. 146; and Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 325 note 75a. Bernstein's concern about state socialism teaching dependence on the government is seen in *Neue Zeit*, IXb



According to the mature Marxism of Kautsky and Bernstein in the early 1890's, a democratic republic was essential for working-class development, proletarian rule, and the transition to socialism. And since Germany still lacked a democratic republic, one would have to be established. Kautsky understood political revolution in Germany as this essential and probably violent conclusion to the Junker monarchy. In the opinion of social democrats, the Prussian nobility still controlled Germany because the bourgeois had failed to carry out a revolution like that of England in the seventeenth century or of France at the close of the eighteenth. Hence from the standpoint of mature Marxism, the German proletariat would need to make up for the bourgeois failure--to lead the middle classes (including the peasants) and those bourgeois still loyal to liberal-democratic ideals in struggle for the democratic republic. Marx, Engels, Kautsky, and Bernstein rejected the Lassalleian idea of "one reactionary mass," by which the workers should not cooperate with other classes. Kautsky contended,

Further, the slogan about the "reactionary mass" is fortunately false. Truly, the proletariat today is the only revolutionary class, but from that it does not follow by a long way that the other classes form a compact mass over against it.

In their program draft Kautsky and Bernstein wished to identify an area of common interest with the petite bourgeois and peasants. They would urge social democrats to exploit antagonisms among the bourgeois and between them and the aristocracy.<sup>11</sup>

(1891), 823. See above, 8, on Bernstein's early skepticism about the state.

What came to be condemned as "reformism," understood in a strict sense, was asking for social reforms from a bourgeois or monarchical government without regard to the future proletarian conquest of power. See also Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 272.

<sup>11</sup>*Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 752. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 389; Engels, "Zur Kritik des sozialdemokratischen Programmentwurfs 1891," *Marx-Engels Werke*, XXII, 235. Engels to Bebel on February 19, 1892, and March 8, 1892, in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Engels*, pp. 509 and 517. *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 786 and 788. Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 252-

For many social democrats the issue of cooperation with other parties was tied to the one of imminent collapse. In 1893 Kautsky endorsed Bernstein's proposal that social democrats participate in the Prussian diet elections in order to help the Liberal Party (Freisinnige)<sup>12</sup> break Junker control and eventually win equal manhood suffrage. When Bernstein's essay containing the proposal arrived for publication, Kautsky replied, "I completely agree with your article about the Prussian diet elections. This has long been my opinion." The proposal was voted down at the Cologne party congress. Kautsky and Bernstein were disappointed with this decision and with how the socialist press had debated the issue of election compromises. On November 23, 1893, Bernstein wrote Kautsky,

The party's policy is correct if we are immediately before the great crash and if its finding us on the one side and the "one reactionary mass" on the other lies in the movement's interest. I doubt the latter and therefore do not believe in even accelerating the former with force. With our people in Berlin, the "class struggle" has become a slogan which hinders unprejudiced criticism.

On May 5, 1894, Kautsky wrote Adler complaining of Liebknecht and the SDF for still talking about "one reactionary mass":

259. The key passage from the *Communist Manifesto* is in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 362.

Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 80-82; John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 76-78; Roth, Chapters Two and Six; Lehnert, *Reform und Revolution*, p. 121; and Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Die Herausbildung des Revisionismus von Eduard Bernstein im Lichte des Briefwechsels Bernstein-Kautsky," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, pp. 42f. Concerning the thought of Marx and Engels on cooperation with other classes, see Hunt, I, Chapter Six, and II, Chapter Four; Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 113-120; and Grebing, *Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, Chapter Two.

<sup>12</sup>The Freisinnige Vereinigung. In the 1890's German liberalism was divided. Liberal parties also included the Deutsche Fortschrittspartei, the Deutsche Volkspartei, and from 1896 to 1903 the Nationalsoziale Verein. Together these four parties won 11% of the vote and 49 seats in the Reichstag elections of 1898. Walther, p. 154.

In practice this grand concept has already been broken countless times, but in our theory it still dominates. . . .

Accordingly social democrats in England make no progress, because they try to carry out the tactic of the Continental socialists in a doctrinaire manner, that is to say consistently, although it is bearable only with the continual violation of its principle: no compromise.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>KK-EB September 21, 1893; EB-KK November 23, 1893; Kautsky to Adler May 5, 1894, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 152f. EB-KK October 15, 1893. Other relevant correspondence includes EB-KK September 13, 1893; EB-KK September 18, 1893; EB-KK October 2, 1893.

That the SPD's refusal to participate in the Prussian elections rested on the Lassallean idea of "one reactionary mass" and not on Marxism is stated in Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 75; here Steinberg refers to Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, p. 182.

Rosen, p. 9; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 112f.; Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 28f. See also below, Chapter Seven.

## H. Violence and Revolution

Among German social democrats in the 1890's, it appears that the term "revolution" could refer to any of four logically distinct kinds of events: (a) a social revolution in which an evolving technology brought about a new social structure or in which certain social relationships were adjusted to the new economic conditions; (b) a political revolution in which the voters in a democratic republic constitutionally elected a socialist government; (c) a political revolution in which a proletariat cooperating with progressive members of other classes took power from a semi-absolutist monarchy and established a democratic republic; and (d) the Kladderadatsch, a sudden collapse of the old order, perhaps throwing the workers into political control before they were ready or the material preconditions for socialism existed.<sup>1</sup>

Not that social democrats at the time necessarily made these distinctions. It seems that for many the "social revolution" would combine the Kladderadatsch bringing the proletariat to power, the establishment of a democratic republic with a worker government, and the rapid achievement of socialism through the expropriation of a small group of giant capitalists. In Germany, bourgeois rule in a democratic republic would be skipped, and the proletariat's establishing the democratic republic meant that the reforms of the Erfurt Program Part Two would be more thoroughly realized.<sup>2</sup>

One could have expected that violence would possibly prove unavoidable should the proletariat take power during war or economic chaos. Ending the Junker monarchy would likely be violent--though not by the wishes of the social democrats. But a social democrat could

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, KK-EB February 18, 1898, and EB-KK February 21, 1898. See also Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>Marga Beyer, "Zur Genesis des Erfurter Programms," in *Revolutionäres Parteiprogramm--Revolutionäre Arbeitereinheit. Studien zum Kampf um die Vereinigung des Marxismus mit der Arbeiterbewegung* (Berlin, 1975), p. 431, cites Paul Singer's deciding that the Erfurt Program need not explicitly call for a democratic republic since a collapse would bring the proletariat to power before a period of bourgeois rule. Compare Engels to Kautsky on December 3, 1891, in "Briefe über den Erfurter Parteitag," p. 1005. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 76f. Walther, p. 140.



think that if war were avoided, if the capitalist economy continued to function normally, and if the democratic republic had been achieved, then the transition to proletarian rule could be peaceful, while the later passage to socialism would necessarily be so. Hence the question of whether or not social democrats anticipated violent revolution depended on which transformation one had in mind.

According to the mature interpretation of Marxism, in a democratic republic the transitions to proletarian rule and then to socialism could be peaceful. In the early 1890's Kautsky went further to suggest that even the establishment of a democratic republic in Germany might be non-violent. He argued that new facts like the army's having more and more soldiers who were social-democratic, the existence of the Reichstag suffrage, and the presence of an organized labor movement meant that the coming revolution need not resemble past violent ones. In any case, violence was not what constituted revolution to social democrats, so some believed that they could affirm revolution without advocating violence to achieve it. In part, the ruling classes would decide the nature of the revolution. Like Engels, Kautsky suspected that should violence occur it might begin with a coup d'état by the rulers, frustrated by the steady growth of working-class and social-democratic power. Kautsky cautioned that social democrats should avoid providing an excuse for a coup d'état.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 756-758; *Neue Zeit*, XIIa (1893-94), 369 and 404; and Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, p. 106. See also ZSAM, Ministerium des Innern, Rep. 77, Tit. CB S, Nr. 278/1, Bl. 5-7, the first page of which is an essay on revolution from the Breslau *Volkswacht* of October 21, 1895. The writer believed that violence was not essential to revolution but that in a profound social revolution violence was probable.

The problems both of manhood suffrage and of social democrats in the army were discussed at a meeting of the Prussian state council on January 26, 1897. The Finance Minister argued that the Reichstag suffrage must be changed, concluding that "in the long run our monarchical state cannot get along with the universal (allgemeine) suffrage." The Minister of War spoke against the Reichstag suffrage and added, "with the short period of service it is difficult to preserve the army from social-democratic influence." In ZSAM, Reichskanzlei, Nr. 647/1, Bl. 20-26. In 1892 Engels predicted, "Today we have one soldier in five, in a few years we will have one in three, and about 1900 the army, hitherto the most Prussian element in the country, will

Engels's controversial Introduction to the 1895 edition of Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850* may be interpreted in light of these concerns. Engels believed that certain preconditions must be present for (a) the successful liberal-democratic revolution against the Junker monarchy, to be followed by (b) proletarian rule and then by (c) the transition to socialism. For the first to occur, social democracy would need to win the rural laborers of East-Elbian Prussia; for the second and third, there would need to exist a numerous and disciplined industrial proletariat.

The Reichstag vote appeared to measure the approaching fulfillment of these preconditions, thus Engels's fascination with the SPD's repeated electoral victories. Though he did not predict that the workers would take political power through a Reichstag election (since the Junkers would not permit it), in the Introduction he did observe that the election campaigns gave opportunity for agitation while the Reichstag itself provided a rostrum from which to address the people. In the past fifty years conditions had altered so much, Engels thought, that it was imperative to allow the process of growth and maturation to continue. He wrote,

The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organization, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for, body and soul. The history of the last fifty years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long persistent work is required, and it is just this work that we are now pursuing and with a success which drives the enemy to despair.

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be socialist in its majority. This process rolls on as inevitably as a judgment of fate. The government in Berlin sees it coming as clearly as we do, but it is powerless. The army is slipping away from it." Quoted in English translation in Hunt, II, 358.

John Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 133-136 and 238; Holzheuer, pp. 42f.; Salvadori, pp. 33f. and 39-41; Hunt, II, 208 and 345-349; Geary, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 76; Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 70 and 80f.

Moreover, changes in military technology had made street fighting very dangerous. Indeed, Engels feared that the rulers might provoke the workers in order to crush them. The SPD should avoid such a setback. It should maintain its growth, winning the middle classes (including the peasants) and becoming the deciding power in the country. Such SPD success would bring the rulers to break the law.<sup>4</sup>

Almost certainly, Engels's position did not constitute a policy of "peace at any price," of trying to conquer political power solely through constitutional means. That Engels could be so variously interpreted on this issue may stem in part from a misunderstanding. Engels's Introduction was to appear at the time of Reichstag debates on a law against the social democrats, the "revolution bill" (Umsturzvorlage) of 1895. To placate a worried party executive committee, Engels consented to the editing of certain passages. However, Liebknecht published excerpts in *Vorwärts* giving the impression that Engels favored a policy of strictly legal, parliamentary action. In a letter to Paul Lafargue, Engels protested that a policy of "peace at any price" applied only to the immediate German situation and even then not totally. Engels wanted the entire Introduction circulated to expunge the false impression Liebknecht had created. Kautsky printed the full edited version in *Neue Zeit*. That Engels approved this form of his Introduction was documented by Bernstein's 1926 publication of a letter from Richard Fischer to Engels on March 14, 1895, and more recently by Hans-Josef Steinberg's publication of Engels's letter to Fischer on March 8. However, in 1925 the Russian scholar David Rjazanov published the deletions made to satisfy the party executive committee, implying that these had occurred against Engels's will. Rjazanov's work may have facilitated the misunderstanding that Engels's comments to Lafargue about Liebknecht's excerpts in *Vorwärts* were directed instead against the *Neue Zeit* version of the Introduction. In fact, Engels opposed

<sup>4</sup>The *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 416-422; the quotation is on p. 420. See also *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 654f.

Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 11f. and 17; Steinberg, "Friedrich Engels' revolutionäre Strategie," pp. 115f. and 121-125; Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, p. 98; Martin Berger, "Engels' Theory of the Vanishing Army: A Key to the Development of Marxist Revolutionary Tactics," *The Historian*, XXXVII (1975), 421-435; Holzheuer, pp. 35-38; Gustafsson, pp. 69-71; Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 72; and below, 65.

Liebknecht's distortion while endorsing the picture of revolution presented in *Neue Zeit*.<sup>5</sup>

Liebknecht's excerpts and Engels's comments to Lafargue can contribute to yet another misunderstanding. Since Bernstein later defended his revisionist ideas by appealing to Engels's Introduction, it might seem that Bernstein misinterpreted Engels in the sense of Liebknecht's "peace at any price." Instead, what Bernstein at first found to be of great significance in the 1895 Introduction was Engels's point that social and economic preconditions (Voraussetzungen) must be met before a revolution could succeed—that is, that social-economic development determined the class struggle. Bernstein underlined Engels's confession of error around 1850 when anticipating the fulfillment of socialism's preconditions:

On the eve of his death, in the Introduction to the "Class Struggles," Engels admitted frankly the mistake he and Marx had made in estimating the length of time of the social and political development. It is not possible to value highly enough the service which he gave the socialist movement with this piece of writing, which one may rightly call his political testament.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Revolution und Legalität. Ein unveröffentlichter Brief Engels' an Richard Fischer," *International Review of Social History*, XII (1967), 177f. and 182-185.

Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 70; Tschubinski, p. 298; *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Engels*, pp. 795f. and 795 note 1; Gustafsson, p. 69; Strutynski, pp. 94f.; Steinberg, "Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie nach dem Fall," p. 55; and the commentary in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 406.

In "Zur Weiterentwicklung der Revolutionstheorie in Friedrich Engels' 'Einleitung zu Karl Marx' *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850*' und zur unmittelbaren Wirkung dieser Arbeit," *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung*, XXIX (1990), 142, Sandy Möser reports that the Introduction was cited during Reichstag debate as evidence that the SPD was moving away from violent revolution toward reformism.

<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*, Introduction by Dieter Schuster (Berlin, 1977), reprint of the 2nd. ed., Stuttgart, 1921, p. 59.



Bernstein was impressed both by Engels's implication that social-economic development could take a long time and by his admission that he and Marx had been mistaken. Engels stated explicitly,

History has proved us, and all who thought like us, wrong. It has made it clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the elimination of capitalist production.

Their assessment of the stage of development accompanied several other decisions: taking the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1830 as models, associating revolution with the next business crisis, thinking that a minority revolution in the interests of the majority could succeed and win majority support, and assuming that the proletariat was prepared to lead.<sup>7</sup>

Here lay questions Bernstein would ask in the years 1895 to 1898: If one could not be certain of imminent collapse, then what opportunities for immediate action should social democrats pursue? What economic, social, and political preconditions did socialism require? How long would the evolution of these preconditions take? What political and social demands fit a given stage in development? How could one's stage in the historical process be identified? Just how mature was the proletariat? Since revolution could not be a minority action, how did one best organize the majority? Equally important, if Engels was now right that he and Marx had once been wrong, then policies based on Marx's judgments around 1850 needed to be reconsidered, but using Marx's method. The new conclusions reached might vary from those of Marx perhaps because of specific mistakes in the past or because of changing conditions. The rethinking might produce new policies, thoroughly Marxist but strikingly different from what Marx envisioned.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>*The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 408-414; the quotation is on p. 412. Gneuss, "Historische und ideologische Voraussetzungen," pp. 75f.

<sup>8</sup>In defending the need for a new party program in 1891, Kautsky argued that new historical conditions meant that the *Communist Manifesto* was dated; *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 782. Compare Colletti, *Bernstein*, pp. 10-12.

## I. Revolution in England

According to mature Marxism, in Germany the liberal-democratic revolution of 1848 had failed, so the proletariat would need to complete the historical task of the bourgeoisie. In contrast, England had experienced its bourgeois revolution in the seventeenth century. Bernstein wrote,

It had in the Presbyterians its Girondists, in the Independents its Jacobins or Mountain, and in the Levelers its Hébertists and Babouvists. Cromwell was its Robespierre and Bonaparte in one, and its Marat and Hébert in one was John Lilburne, the Leveler.

Since by 1895 Great Britain was practically a democratic republic, the transition to proletarian rule would not have to be violent. Already in Amsterdam in 1872 Marx had stated,

We know one must take into consideration the institutions, customs, and traditions of different countries, and we do not deny that there are countries like America, England, and if your institutions were more familiar to me I might perhaps add Holland, where the workers can reach their goal through peaceful ways.

In 1886 Engels recalled how Marx had believed that in England the social revolution could occur non-violently and legally, though he also remembered how Marx had suspected a possible counterrevolution thereafter. Still, in his 1891 letter to Liebknecht criticizing the Erfurt Program June draft, Engels admitted,

One can imagine the old society growing peacefully into the new in countries where the representatives of the people hold all power . . . in democratic republics like France and America, in monarchies like England, where the royal family is powerless against the will of the people.

For Engels as for Marx, the profound constitutional difference between England and Germany was of central importance.<sup>1</sup>

Particular conditions in each country determined the class struggle. Bernstein did not step beyond this principle when he wrote in his 1891 article against Schulze-Gävernitz,

The social revolution does not depend on violent surprise attacks and bloody revolts. With the right to assemble, the freedom of the press which the English workers enjoy, and universal suffrage, which they will achieve in a matter of only a few years, they can give their demands and endeavors such energetic expression that these sooner or later must become law. Progress will not always be completed through homeopathic doses; the speed of economic development will require measures of the most decisive nature; but it is nowhere written that these too cannot be carried out within the realm of legislation. On the other hand one can assume that given the continued free development of the English working classes these will not make any demands for which the necessity and prospect for being carried out have not shown themselves to be beyond any question. That the feeling is widespread on both sides removes from today's struggles unnecessary sharpness but does not end these struggles themselves nor change the fact that the end result must be the removal of the capitalist economic system.

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<sup>1</sup>Bernstein, *Sozialismus und Demokratie in der großen englischen Revolution*, in *Die Vorläufer des neuen Sozialismus*, Part II of Vol. I, *Die Geschichte des Sozialismus in Einzeldarstellungen*, Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, eds. (Stuttgart, 1895), p. 509. *Marx-Engels Werke*, XVIII, 160; XXII, 234; and XIII, 40. Engels is quoted in Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," p. xi note 1.

L. A. Leontijew, *Engels und die ökonomische Lehre des Marxismus*, Fred Oelßner, tr. (Berlin, 1970), p. 303; Ossip K. Flechtheim, "Friedrich Engels—orthodoxer Marxist oder erster Revisionist?" in *Sozialismus, Geschichte und Wirtschaft. Festschrift für Eduard März* (Vienna, 1973), p. 298; John-Hans Kautsky, "Political Thought of Karl Kautsky," pp. 252-259; Abendroth, *Aufstieg und Krise*, p. 31; and especially Hunt, II, 142, 328-332, and 337.

Kautsky recognized the variety of contexts in which the class struggle could occur:

The tendencies of the capitalist form of production are the same in all countries in which it dominates; and yet, how different are the state and social forms of the different capitalist countries; how very different in England than in France, different in France than in Germany, and again very different from those in America! The historical tendencies in the labor movement created by the existing form of production are the same everywhere; but the forms which the movement takes are of a special nature in each country.<sup>2</sup>

Engels had taught that political conditions in the Superstructure could impinge on social-economic developments in the Basis. From this insight one might infer that England need not follow Germany's example.

Engels was frustrated by what he perceived to be the English laborers' lack of political maturity. He complained in 1894,

One is indeed driven to despair by these English workers with their sense of imaginary national superiority, with their essentially bourgeois ideas and viewpoints, with their "practical" narrow-mindedness, with the parliamentary corruption which has seriously infected the leaders.

But one should not forget Engels's enthusiasm at the new developments in the British labor movement in the late 1880's. Bernstein also had a mixed assessment. On the one side, he thought that the trade unions were moving toward socialism; he believed that socialist ideas had permeated the Liberal Party; and he reasoned that the Liberal Party's dependence on the labor vote forced it to adopt worker demands. As the proletariat gradually gained political influence in a country, it was all right to begin socialization. Bernstein and Kautsky agreed on this judgment. Kautsky observed,

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<sup>2</sup>Bernstein, *Neue Zeit*, IXa (1890-91), 734; also quoted in Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, p. 121. Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, p. 143. Gustafsson, pp. 85f.



Already today there exist states in which the government executive is so dependent on the people in general and also in which the working class itself has achieved such strength and influence that one need not fear that an extension of the economic power and authority of the executive would lead to further suppression and exploitation of the population. And on the other hand there exist already today a series of branches of industry in which centralization is so far advanced that they indeed already form monopolies, often monopolies of the most oppressive nature. In such a state the nationalization of this sort of enterprise can lead not to an increase but to a decrease in exploitation and suppression of the population in general and specifically of the affected workers; that is, nationalization can already in the present state, despite its acting according to fiscal principles or as a capitalist entrepreneur, under certain conditions be an advantage for the fighting proletariat; and nationalizations like this of economically important branches of industry can very rightly be seen as preparations for and transition stages to the socialist society.<sup>3</sup>

To their way of thinking, such acts of socialization in England should not be confused with state socialism in Germany because the former country was almost a democratic republic, one where the proletariat had great influence.

The basic constitutional difference between England and Germany led to just such confusion. For example, Bernstein's writings on England were pervaded by a feeling of urgency, a sense that socialization could now begin and that questions about how to proceed needed answered. But in Germany such ideas could sound like state socialism. Other misinterpretations arose from terminology. "That

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<sup>3</sup>Engels is quoted by L. F. Ilyichov and others, *Friedrich Engels. A Biography*, Victor Schreier, tr. (Moscow, 1974), p. 438. *Neue Zeit*, Xa (1891-92), 10f., 18, and 152; *Neue Zeit*, Xb (1892), 596 and 710. The quotation from Kautsky is on p. 710. *Justice*, September 5, 1896, p. 1; and September 19, pp. 4f. Helga Grebing, *Der Revisionismus. Von Bernstein bis zum "Prager Frühling"*, (Munich, 1966), p. 25. Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford, 1965), pp. 7, 11, and 87. On Engels and British labor in the late 1880's, see below, 116.

concepts associated with like-sounding political expressions do not fully correspond between countries contributes much to mutual misunderstanding," Bernstein later reflected. As an example Bernstein told how the Fabian George Bernard Shaw had said that class struggle did not exist in England but within a year the Fabians along with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) were calling workers to abandon the Liberal Party. Bernstein remarked, "Thus to a large extent Shaw practiced what we Germans understand by the class struggle, but he did not accept the name because he associated it with a very different concept."<sup>4</sup> That Bernstein developed many of his most important ideas for England but published them in Germany added greatly to confusion about his thought.

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When Bernstein, accompanied by Eleanor Marx and others, cast Engels's ashes into the Channel,<sup>5</sup> he did mark a transition in his career. Formerly, with Kautsky he had helped propagate and develop further an interpretation of Marxism which they had learned, for the most part, under Engels's tutelage. Their Marxism was characterized by a determinism which still allowed for human consciousness in historical change; by socialism combined with political democracy; by a respect for Marx's method of analysis but a critical awareness when applying it. Now with Engels's death, Kautsky and Bernstein had to defend mature Marxism without their mentor.

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<sup>4</sup>Bernstein, *Aus den Jahren*, pp. 245f.; also cited in Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, p. 95. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 118f.

<sup>5</sup>Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, p. 134.

## Chapter Two: The Agrarian Question (1895)

### A. Earlier Social-Democratic Views on the Agrarian Question

One of the last letters Engels read came from Kautsky asking advice on the agrarian question, an issue closely associated with the revolutionary strategy Engels had advanced at the end of the Anti-Socialist Laws. Engels believed that the proletariat and other progressive forces would need to establish a democratic republic. In Germany this revolution might be violent, precipitated perhaps by a Junker attack on the Reich constitution. To win, the workers would want at least passive toleration from the peasantry but active support from the rural proletariat, especially that of East-Elbian Prussia. Engels predicted,

Sow the seed of social democracy among these workers, give them the courage and solidarity to insist on their rights and it is over with Junker rule. . . . The elite regiments of the Prussian army will become social democratic and with this will occur a shift in power which carries a whole revolution in its lap.

Social democrats found the Reichstag vote important because it measured rising socialist influence among the rural population, not because they believed that the Junkers would allow the SPD to come to power through a parliamentary majority.<sup>1</sup>

German socialists had long worried about the countryside. Marx and Engels included agrarian measures in the *Communist Manifesto* and in other writings. In 1869 the Basel Congress of the First International voted for socializing land because they thought that it would benefit the peasants. After initial opposition, by 1870 Liebknecht had become an advocate of an agrarian program in the sense of Marx and Engels: The small peasant holding was doomed in competition with the capitalist farm; socialism was accordingly the peasants' only hope; a proletarian government could help them establish

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<sup>1</sup> *Marx-Engels Werke*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, eds. (Berlin, 1957ff.), XXII, 505. Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie nach dem Fall des Sozialistengesetzes," in *Sozialdemokratie zwischen Klassenbewegung und Volkspartei*, Hans Mommsen, ed. (Frankfurt/M., 1974), pp. 56f.



their own cooperatives to share in modern technology. During the Anti-Socialist Law period, Kautsky composed tracts for peasant agitation. He differed from Engels in being more pessimistic about how successful their agitation would be. Kautsky suspected that at most the peasants might become passively supportive or neutral, staying aloof from a future conflict between Junkers and workers instead of fighting actively against the proletariat.<sup>2</sup>

At the Halle party congress in October 1890, Bebel outlined an aggressive campaign of rural agitation; and in December the party executive committee challenged social democrats to win the rural proletariat. So it was in the midst of considerable agrarian enthusiasm that Kautsky and Bernstein wrote and defended their draft of the party program. Kautsky thought their proposal better for rural agitation than that of Liebknecht, and Kautsky dedicated nearly one sixth of his 1892 program commentary to the peasants.<sup>3</sup>

There and in his *Neue Zeit* articles on the program draft, Kautsky again presented the accepted position: The small peasant farm was economically hopeless, to be replaced by the more efficient capitalist enterprise. It was stupid to accuse socialists of wanting to expropriate the peasants since the capitalists were doing so already. True, some small producers managed to survive, but with suffering. Kautsky wrote,

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<sup>2</sup>On the peasant program of Marx and Engels, see Helmut Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten, Opportunisten und die Bauern am Vorabend des Imperialismus* (Berlin, 1968), pp. 7-11. On Liebknecht's early views, see Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, p. 13; Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854-1938. Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh, 1978), p. 102; Wadim Tschubinski, *Wilhelm Liebknecht. Eine Biographie*, Bernhard Jahnel, tr. (Berlin, 1973), pp. 184f.; and Hans Georg Lehmann, *Die Agrarfrage in der Theorie und Praxis der deutschen und internationalen Sozialdemokratie. Vom Marxismus zum Revisionismus und Bolschewismus* (Tübingen, 1970), pp. 5f. Kautsky's early effort at peasant agitation is described by Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 103f.; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 9f.; and Massimo Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution 1880-1938*, Jon Rothschild, tr. (New York, 1979), pp. 52f.

<sup>3</sup>Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 21-23 and 87f.; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 14 and 19-24. *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 786.

Work time is extended into the late night; wife and child are pulled into earning a living; expensive mature journeymen are replaced with cheaper apprentices whose number increases excessively. And as the work time is extended and the work itself becomes feverish, without rest, without pause, nourishment decreases and expenditures for housing and clothing are limited more and more.

There is no more wretched, miserable life than that of a small craftsman or small peasant caught in competition with large-scale production.

In Kautsky's opinion, social democrats dare not promise economic survival to the peasants, for the demise of small-scale production was inevitable. To try to prevent it through government assistance was futile at best, and such state socialism could slow economic advance and prolong the agony of peasant existence. However, social democrats could promise immediate relief to small producers as citizens and consumers. For example, the peasant would benefit along with the laborer from an end to the high cost of militarism. Then with proletarian rule, the government could grant economic reforms like the nationalization of mortgages which might assist individual peasants to continue independently, and it could help others establish production cooperatives. Of course, even under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, those peasants who wished to stay on their separate plots would be left to their economic fate at the hands of competition.<sup>4</sup>

Armed with the Erfurt Program, with Kautsky's commentary, and with the agrarian program contained in them, social democrats went to the countryside to win the peasants by convincing them that their economic situation was irremediable. The socialists appealed not only to a landless rural proletariat but also to small peasants emotionally tied to their holdings. The party tried not merely to neutralize the peasants' hostility but also to win them as voters and perhaps even as active party members. And the social democrats met with some success. Both the intensified agitation and the SPD's increased rural vote in the 1893 Reichstag elections frightened the government. The party itself, in contrast, was disappointed with what many judged poor results for their efforts. The social-democratic vote rose from

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<sup>4</sup>Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, pp. 21-30 and 147-153. The quotation is on pp. 25f. Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 88f., 92f., and 99f.; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 32.

1,427,298 in 1890 only to 1,786,738 in 1893, not to the 2,500,000 expected. Bebel wrote Engels, "It is remarkable how the entire world was deluded about us just as we deluded ourselves." In October 1893 the Cologne party congress considered methods of rural agitation and passed a motion introduced by Bruno Schönlanke, editor of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, to discuss the issue further at the next congress, in Frankfurt am Main.<sup>5</sup>

In late 1893 Kautsky feared that to gain votes social democrats might propose offering the peasants individual economic security under the current state instead of collective security under a future proletarian government. In part, Georg von Vollmar, Simon Katzenstein, and Eduard David were prepared to do so. In October 1893 Vollmar proposed a peasant program to the Bavarian diet. He wanted immediate reforms on behalf of small-scale agriculture and promised that once the allied workers and peasants had taken power they would stop capitalist advance in the countryside. In June 1894 the five social-democratic diet representatives voted for the Bavarian budget. In March 1894 Katzenstein of Gießen had written that winning the peasants would require proposals in their direct interests. Telling them that they were economically doomed would not succeed. Katzenstein wanted an agrarian commission to write a program—with the goal of turning the peasants into allies, though perhaps not into active party members. In August and September 1894 a series of articles appeared titled "Concerning Rural Agitation in Middle Germany" by Eduard David, also from Gießen. He suggested, "Let's stick our program in our pocket for a while and first study the village and its inhabitants closely." Noting the strong attachment of peasants to their land, he advocated government assistance to help them maintain their property. He also urged the formation of peasant cooperatives. These developments in Germany paralleled ones in France. In September

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<sup>5</sup>Bebel to Engels is quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 58. Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 38, 43-45, 137f.; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 56-61.

Though I finally reach an interpretation of Engels and Kautsky different from the one of Lehmann, I am particularly indebted to his splendid work on the agrarian issue.

Government concern about the rising SPD activity and vote in the countryside is reflected in ZSAP, Reichs-Justizamt, Nr. 6579/2, Bl. 29f.; and in ZSAM, Ministerium des Innern, Rep. 77, Tit. 381, Nr. 23/3, Bl. 192.

1892 the Parti Ouvrier Français adopted an agrarian program at Marseilles. In September 1894 the party, meeting in Nantes, augmented the Marseilles program with a promise of defending peasant agriculture. Industry, where the workers had lost their means of production to capital, was contrasted to agriculture, where the peasants still owned their land. The Nantes document called for peasant protection.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>David is quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 97. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 40, 71f., 77-84, 96-98, and 100f.; Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 168-179; and Gerhard A. Ritter, *Die Arbeiterbewegung im Wilhelminischen Reich. Die Sozialdemokratische Partei und die Freien Gewerkschaften 1890-1900* (Berlin, 1959), pp. 139f.



## B. The Frankfurt Party Congress

At the Frankfurt party congress in October 1894, conflict over the agrarian question began with Bebel fighting the Bavarian social democrats over their voting for a provincial budget. Hence alongside the primarily theoretical question of whether peasant production was economically hopeless there arose the equally important tactical question of whether the SPD should collaborate with the existing government. The agrarian issue was as much one of state socialism as of economic evolution. However, despite the social-democratic aversion to state socialism, the party congress would not censure the Bavarians, which in effect meant their victory—and Bebel's defeat.<sup>1</sup>

Then Schönlank and Vollmar introduced their resolution on agrarian agitation. Schönlank portrayed two struggles occurring in the countryside—that between old fashioned and modern forms of production and that of the great landholders against the peasants, workers, and tenants. He thought that the SPD could most easily win the rural proletariat, but he was also optimistic about the small peasants and possibly still others. At least the agitation might quiet fear of social democracy. He warned, "We must prevent the nail-driving shoes of the peasants and the peasant sons from being turned against us; we must neutralize them, pacify them." To do so Schönlank wanted to add agrarian material to the Erfurt Program. He criticized earlier rural agitation for being "schematic" (schablonenhaft). Vollmar advised that the urban social democrat "first burn all his old agitation material and before anything else think himself into the rural relations of production, into the whole way the peasant thinks and feels." Supposedly, Engels had endorsed the Nantes program. In Vollmar's opinion, finding in industry a model for agrarian development was a "traditional schema" (hergebrachte Schablone); small-scale agricultural production might survive for a long time.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 104f. See also *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Frankfurt a. M. vom 21. bis 27. Oktober 1894* (Berlin, 1894), pp. 114-134. Hereafter cited as *Protokoll Frankfurt*. On the state-socialist dimension of the agrarian question, see below, 87 note 2.

<sup>2</sup>Schönlank is quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 105; Vollmar, in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 106. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 105-107;

The resolution which Schönlank and Vollmar submitted recognized a need for careful study of agrarian conditions and for appropriate agitation material. It called for an agrarian commission to bring a proposal to the next party congress. The resolution's controversial point was as follows:

The agrarian question as a necessary element of the social question will be solved once and for all only when the land and tools are returned to the producers who today as wage workers or small peasants till the soil in the service of capital.

As in the Nantes supplement, this ambiguous formulation permitted the promise of artificially maintaining peasant agriculture. The resolution also said, "peasant protection (Bauernschutz) will save the peasant from disadvantages as taxpayer, debtor, and landlord"—which meant helping preserve peasant ownership under the present government. Though Bebel opposed these ideas, he did not speak against the resolution; and it passed overwhelmingly.<sup>3</sup>

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Salvadori, p. 50; Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 188f.; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 105. See also *Protokoll Frankfurt*, 134-152.

Was it perhaps about Schönlank's speech at Frankfurt that Bebel wrote to Kautsky on December 3, 1894, "Sch's pacification and neutralization of the middle-sized and large peasants is the greatest humbug, more accurately the greatest stupidity, I have ever heard. What the man could possibly imagine by that?" The quotation is in *August Bebels Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky, Jr., ed. (Assen, 1971), p. 83.

Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 108 note 12, reports that Miquel wrote Emperor Wilhelm II on November 10, 1894, about the Frankfurt congress. Miquel considered Vollmar the most dangerous. If the statement represents a widespread government attitude toward the right wing of the SPD, then it would seem to suggest that the right wing's state-socialist approach was futile.

<sup>3</sup>The passages are quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 110f. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 109-112; Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 192f. See also *Protokoll Frankfurt*, pp. 134f.

## C. Reactions to the Frankfurt Party Congress

After the October 1894 party congress, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* referred to the SPD as merely a "radical reform party." Nonetheless, there occurred little public social-democratic criticism of the Agrarian Resolution. *Vorwärts* criticized it only mildly.<sup>4</sup> Privately, Kautsky was displeased with Vollmar's victory for state socialism. He even wished that Vollmar would secede from the party to lead a new movement composed of non-revolutionary groups dissatisfied with the Reich. Kautsky contemplated an article on peasant agitation including mention of Vollmar, but he felt it difficult to act alone. The ridiculing of earlier rural agitation upset Bernstein. He expected that Engels would rebut Vollmar's citing him, and Bernstein proposed an article of his own, on the First International's land policy.<sup>5</sup>

Then sometime in early November 1894, Engels wrote Bebel about Frankfurt. Though we lack Engels's letter to Bebel, we can surmise its contents from one to Sorge on November 10. Engels worried that "on the Continent success leads to the desire for more success, and 'peasant catching' in the literal sense is becoming fashionable." At Nantes, social democrats had decided to protect the small holdings. Engels observed, "We cannot go along with this, because it is first stupid and second impossible." Vollmar had sacrificed the interests of the domestic servants, which meant "abandoning the whole principle." On November 12 Engels wrote *Vorwärts* to protest Vollmar's citing him:

There is nothing in principle against correctly selected measures intended to make the small peasants' unavoidable decline less painful; but if one goes further, if one wishes to maintain the small peasants indefinitely, then in my opinion one is attempting the economically impossible, is surrendering principle, is becoming reactionary.

<sup>4</sup>Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 194f.; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup>KK-EB November 14, 1894; EB-KK October 29, 1894. Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 76; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 137; and Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 105.

On November 10 Bebel complained to Engels about the Frankfurt Resolution. He had been so disappointed that he had considered resigning. Bebel agreed that something had to be done about Vollmar.<sup>6</sup>

So at a Berlin assembly on November 14, Bebel denounced the Frankfurt party congress in general and Vollmar in particular. Bebel shared his distress about a rising number of petite bourgeois in the party, a weakening of the class struggle, and a spreading of bourgeois reformism. He blamed the South Germans especially, for he judged them the ones most ready to relinquish the class struggle and the party's proletarian character. The newspaper report of his speech included his suggestions for an agrarian program acceptable to him, one emphasizing the rural proletariat and the social control of land.<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, given the widespread acceptance of the Frankfurt Resolution, the assembled comrades were stunned. Eventually, Arthur Stadthagen spoke, basically agreeing with Bebel but not accepting entirely his proposed resolution, which warned of "uncertainty" in the party and condemned the Frankfurt decision on the provincial-budget issue. Richard Fischer was troubled by the personal tone of Bebel's remarks. Georg Ledebour thought that in the Erfurt Program commentary even Kautsky had foreseen peasant agriculture continuing under socialism. Still, Bebel's resolution was finally approved, igniting one of the most bitter internecine conflagrations in the SPD's history.<sup>8</sup>

In Bavaria, Karl Grillenberger and Vollmar attacked Bebel strongly. Much of the SPD press favored Vollmar, the Hanover *Volkswille* even proposing Bebel's expulsion. But most importantly, in effect Liebknecht sided with the Bavarians. He professed neutrality; but in light of *Vorwärts*'s general approval of the Frankfurt congress, his refusal to criticize the Bavarians meant implicit sanction of them. In a letter to Grillenberger he referred to Bebel's "stupidity" and "lack of discipline" and added, "That I do not agree with him, everyone can read in *Vorwärts*—in and between the lines." However, Liebknecht also

<sup>6</sup>Engels to Sorge is in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 118; Engels to *Vorwärts* is in Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, p. 196. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 116-120.

<sup>7</sup>Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 197f.; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 114f.

<sup>8</sup>Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 115f.



sought to keep the controversy from getting out of hand. On November 16 he requested Engels's help to calm Bebel down.<sup>9</sup>

On November 21 and 24 Kautsky wrote Adler to voice dismay with Liebknecht. Bebel asserted to Kautsky that Liebknecht was motivated by jealousy and that there raged an intense personal conflict between the two leaders. Bebel said,

You have no idea what fights have occurred with the old man behind the scenes. Twice our relationship hung in the balance; along with the conflict Vollmar-Bebel--if I may pinpoint it so--there was another conflict: Liebknecht-Bebel.

Then Engels intervened a second time, in a November 24 letter to Liebknecht on the importance of the issues Bebel had raised. On November 29 Liebknecht publicized in *Vorwärts* that he supported Bebel on the substantive matters of the provincial budgets and the agrarian question.<sup>10</sup>

Bebel was rescued by the concurrence of several events: Engels's personal correspondence with leaders like Liebknecht, the other *Vorwärts* editors' refusing to cooperate further in helping the Bavarians, the Reichstag delegation's taking up the matter, Vollmar's illness, and the Reich government's introducing new legislation threatening the party. Bernstein sent his article on the First International, and Kautsky analyzed the conflict for the Vienna

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<sup>9</sup>Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 120-124. On p. 120 Lehmann quotes Liebknecht's comments to Grillenberger. Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, p. 199. Raymond H. Dominick, III, *Wilhelm Liebknecht and the Founding of the German Social Democratic Party* (Chapel Hill, 1982), pp. 391f., describes Liebknecht's desire to have *Vorwärts* open to all opinions in the party and his concern to keep peace.

<sup>10</sup>Bebel to Kautsky is in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Kautsky*, p. 82, and is quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 124. Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Friedrich Adler, ed. (Vienna, 1954), pp. 161f. and 164. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 123-127; Tschubinski, p. 295.

*Arbeiterzeitung*, taking a stand in favor of Bebel while expecting the article to be reprinted in Germany.<sup>11</sup>

Kautsky also replied to Ledebour's mistaken recollection about Kautsky's views on the survival of peasant agriculture in socialism. According to Kautsky, the materialist understanding taught that socialism was ultimately determined by the mode of production.

Thus the socialization of the means of production is not in all circumstances possible and necessary, rather only where capitalist large-scale production has already reached a certain advanced evolution. The socialist mode of production is impossible to carry out where small-peasant production is not yet economically surpassed.

So in his commentary on the Erfurt Program, he had reasoned that it would be senseless to expropriate the remaining small producers since the goal of socialism was to provide the workers with their necessary means of production. Kautsky wrote,

It is this passage which the friends of the new tactic love to call upon. But only those who do not understand how to differentiate between a specific form of property and a specific manner of production and who pull this passage out of context can conclude from it that I advocate keeping small-scale production in the socialist society because I explain that the violent removal of small-scale property is not absolutely necessary.

His real point had been something else.

When the proletariat conquers political power, there will still exist alongside the large firms, which will be expropriated immediately, the remnants of peasant and handicraft forms of

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<sup>11</sup>Bebel to Adler December 6 and 12, 1894, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 166-168; Kautsky to Adler November 26, 1894, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 162f. Kautsky's article for the *Arbeiterzeitung* was titled "Der Konflikt in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie" and appeared beginning November 30, 1894; it was reprinted in *Vorwärts* on December 4. Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 200f. and 210; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 125 and 137-140.

production. . . . From an economic standpoint it would be pointless to abolish small-scale ownership so long as small-scale production could continue. And these remnants may--not in the socialist society but rather, as I explicitly underscore, during the transition stage to it--continue to exist for a time.<sup>12</sup>

From Kautsky's perspective, Ledebour had failed to allow for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, a transition phase when a worker government would rule in a mixed economy with both privately owned and socialized enterprises.

Kautsky expressed his conviction that under proletarian rule the promise of collective agriculture would win the peasants away from their individual plots faster than capitalist expropriation had driven them away. He protested that throughout his commentary he had emphasized the demise of small-scale production, that he had mentioned the misery caused by its continuation, that he had called "peasant protection" utopian, and that he had stressed that only those peasants who already saw themselves as proletarians could be convinced of socialism, the others remaining among the worst enemies of social democracy. Kautsky repudiated an appeal to peasants employing wage labor:

To begin with, our task in the countryside is the same as in the city: in the class struggle to support the proletarians (whether they still possess a scrap of land or not) through organization, through education about methods and ways and about the goals of the struggle. We cannot do this without turning the exploiters against us. We cannot win friends in the countryside without also making enemies, all the more bitter enemies the more effective--i.e., the more successful--our agitation is.

Admittedly, the policy would not bring immediate popularity in rural areas. Kautsky continued,

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<sup>12</sup>Kautsky, "Das Erfurter Programm und die Landagitation," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIa (1894-95), 278f. A brief commentary is in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 137.

Whoever seeks only momentary successes may accordingly find the purely proletarian nature of agitation in the countryside very impractical; in any case it is more convenient to stick our program in our pocket and abandon the wage workers of the middle and large peasants, demanding for these "taxpayers, debtors, and landlords" "peasant protection and state aid." And this requires, by the way, a thorough revolution of our program and tactic. But then do we remain the party of the proletarian class struggle?

Kautsky wondered why social democrats were questioning a course of action that had gone so well in the last few years. His answer:

The great difficulty for our party today is not the excessive slowness but rather the quickness of its growth. Since 1890 new elements have streamed to us in such numbers that the number of old comrades is not sufficient to instruct and educate the newcomers, especially since the practical tasks have grown enormously and absorb the schooled members. We suffer from an insufficiency not of followers but rather of clear-thinking, thoroughly trained party comrades.<sup>13</sup>

In this way Kautsky addressed Bebel's concern about the quality of new party members.

When Ledebour continued the debate in a personal manner, Kautsky submitted a response to *Vorwärts* which Liebknecht turned down. On December 10 Kautsky appealed the decision to the party executive committee, threatening to leave the SPD unless *Vorwärts* print at least a modified statement from him. The day before, he had shared with Bebel his opinion that Liebknecht's importance had been declining since Marx's death.

L has never been a consistent, well-trained Marxist in the sense that he consciously worked according to the Marxist method. He has always been an eclectic who has taken his ideas and arguments from wherever they were easiest to fetch.

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<sup>13</sup>Kautsky, "Das Erfurter Programm und die Landagitation," pp. 279-281.



Kautsky added,

The worst is that his method of making everything conform to a schema and of avoiding each difficulty is gaining followers. This method meets the needs of the party intelligentsia who have no time for serious study. And so along with *Vorwärts*, the party press and the entire party literature becomes shallow.

For Kautsky the battle to defend Bebel had become a struggle against Liebknecht.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Kautsky to Bebel on December 9, 1894, in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Kautsky*, pp. 84-86. Kautsky to Bebel on December 10, 1894, in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Kautsky*, pp. 87-90; Kautsky to Adler on December 13, 1894, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 170. Several months later Kautsky recalled for Adler, "The one who behaved basely was not Ledebour, but Liebknecht." Kautsky to Adler on June 20, 1895, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 180f.

See also EB-KK December 13, 1894; EB-KK January 21, 1895; Adler to Kautsky on June 3, 1895, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 179, and p. 88 note 3. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 106, mentions the conflict, as does Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 140f.

#### D. Engels's "The Peasant Question"

Important support for Bebel came from Engels's *Neue Zeit* article "The Peasant Question in France and Germany," published during the first week of December 1894. Engels postulated that to conquer political power the social-democratic party needed help from the rural population. Of the peasants, the first in question were those hiring no labor and differing from wage workers by owning their means of production. Engels believed that because of competition the small peasant was sinking into poverty, that he was a prospective proletarian, that he was hence a natural ally. Engels praised the Marseilles program for offering some aid to the peasants, while not promising them economic security. The Nantes supplement was mistaken to do so, he thought. It was particularly wrong for proposing relief to landowners exploiting wage labor. Yes, the French correctly affirmed that socialists had no interest in hurrying the demise of small-scale production and that the socialist government would not expropriate the small peasants. But there was no doubt that large-scale production would supersede small. Engels insisted,

It is the duty of our party to clarify to the peasants again and again the absolute hopelessness of their situation so long as capitalism dominates, the absolute impossibility of maintaining their property in scattered parcels of land, the absolute certainty that large-scale capitalist production will surpass their powerless decrepit small-scale production like a locomotive surpasses a wheelbarrow. If we do so then we are acting in the sense of inevitable economic development, and it is this which will open the minds of the small peasants to our words.

Engels granted that from time to time a social-democratic party might cooperate with groups wishing to preserve the small holding—for example, cooperate in common actions against feudal interests. But the party had no use for peasant members demanding preservation of their outmoded form of production. The attempt to preserve it would only prove futile eventually and might also prolong the peasants' misery.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Marx-Engels Werke*, XXII, 485-502; the quotation is from pp. 501f. Adler asked Kautsky why Engels had not attacked Vollmar more directly, and Kautsky replied that Engels did not wish to appear

While they stipulated the demise of small-scale production, the social democrats could make certain promises to the peasants, Engels thought. Once the socialists had conquered political power, the government could encourage and assist the peasants to join cooperative farms. Engels believed that on such cooperatives they could work to save their homes and lands. The social-democratic government could help each small peasant take this step. Engels wrote,

We will do everything possible to make his lot more bearable; to make his transition to the cooperative easier, should he decide to do this; yes and even to make possible more time on his parcel of land to think, should he not yet be ready to make the decision. We will do so not only because we consider the small peasant who has no employees as virtually belonging to us already but also in the direct interest of the party. The larger the number of peasants whom we save from the real fall into the proletariat, whom we already win as peasants, the faster and easier the social transformation will be. It cannot help us if we must wait with the transformation until capitalist production has developed to its last consequences everywhere, until the last small craftsman and the last small peasant have fallen victim to the large capitalist enterprise.<sup>2</sup>

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to be meddling in German affairs. See Adler to Kautsky on December 11, 1894, and Kautsky to Adler on December 13, 1894, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 167-170. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 128 note 1. For summary and commentary on Engels's article see also Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 129-131; and Fritz Zimmermann, "Friedrich Engels' Hilfe für die deutsche Sozialdemokratie im Kampf gegen den Opportunismus in der Bauernfrage in den neunziger Jahren des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Beiträge*, III (1961), Sonderheft, pp. 176-178, 181, and 183.

<sup>2</sup>*Marx-Engels Werke*, XXII, 498-501. The quotation is on p. 501; it is included in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 132.

Summary and commentary are to be found in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 131-135; and in Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 205f. See also Hans Georg Lehmann, "Karl Kautsky und die Agrarfrage," in *Marxismus und Demokratie. Karl Kautskys Bedeutung in der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung*, Jürgen Rojahn, Till Schelz-Brandenburg, and Hans-Josef Steinberg, eds. (Frankfurt/M. and New York, 1992), p. 103.

Engels's recommendations applied to an economic system with individual peasants competing against capitalist farms. So one might plausibly infer that his proposals for government aid to peasant cooperatives and individuals applied to the then current state. But would Engels have endorsed a reformist, state-socialist program? Almost certainly not. Marxism as it was understood by Kautsky and Bernstein in the mid-1890's allowed that proletarian rule could continue for some time with a mixed economy, the transition to socialism occurring only gradually. Engels did write that social democrats should not wait for capitalism to destroy every small producer; he did reason that it would be better to win over the peasants by generous concessions in defiance of free-market economic principles; but here Engels was discussing the social revolution from capitalism into socialism—that is, the social transformation occurring after a political revolution had brought the proletariat to power.

Having treated the small peasants at length, Engels finished quickly with the middle and large peasants and landed aristocracy. The socialist government would probably not expropriate the large peasants. But they would lose their supply of cheap labor. The great estates would be socialized, possibly with compensation. Promising the Junkers' land to the East-Elbian rural proletariat would help win it to the SPD and thus undermine Junker power.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>*Marx-Engels Werke*, XXII, 502-505. Above, 65. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 133f.

## E. The Agrarian Commission

In his Berlin philippic against Vollmar, Bebel claimed that at Frankfurt he had not desired the formation of the Agrarian Commission. He preferred a special party congress to deal with the agrarian question. Bebel's apprehension was understandable since the commission was weighted heavily in Vollmar's favor; and Bebel's fears were confirmed when the commission drafted an Agrarian Program leaning toward the South German position. Chaired by Liebknecht and including Bebel, Vollmar, Schönknecht, Katzenstein, David, Max Schippel, Max Quarck, Georg Baßler, and others, the commission assembled on February 10 and 11, 1895, at the Reichstag building in Berlin. After a heated debate between Bebel and Vollmar, it formed three regional groups representing southern, middle, and northern Germany--thus emphasizing the small peasants at the expense of the East-Elbian rural proletariat. The three sub-committees met separately during the late winter and spring and then rejoined in late June, again at the Reichstag building. The commission took the draft program of the middle-Germany group and amended it point by point, often with conflicts between Bebel and David, Vollmar being absent because of illness.<sup>4</sup>

The proposals covered five major areas: (a) ending feudal privileges; (b) securing for rural workers the rights of urban labor; (c) extending publicly owned lands, to be farmed by the government or leased to cooperatives--or to individuals when the latter was more efficient (which suggested that small-scale production could be better than large); (d) demanding state assistance to landowners in the form of nationalized mortgages, nationalized insurance, and lowered interest rates; and (e) establishing agricultural schools. The proposals were characterized by an attempt to help landholders, including the Junkers, at the expense of others. For example, paragraph 10 advocated abolishing taxes on land; the change would have immensely profited owners of large estates while the lost revenues would presumably have been made up through higher indirect taxes. Paragraph 13 revived Lassalle's idea of government aid to production cooperatives. The proposals repeatedly appealed to the existing state. Bebel's preamble to

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<sup>4</sup>Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 115 and 145-153; Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, p. 211-213.

the Agrarian Program advertised the new attitude by calling for reforms within the current political and social order.<sup>5</sup>

When the Agrarian Commission's program appeared in mid-July 1895, it met vehement disapproval from the party rank and file. According to one modern study, of 223 social-democratic assemblies between July 21 and October 3, the Agrarian Program was voted on by 156. Of these, 138 opposed it; 12 declined to take a definite stand; 6 gave some support. Not one of the meetings fully endorsed it. Social democrats maintained that the proposals violated socialist ideas, often citing Engels's "The Peasant Question," the Erfurt Program, or Kautsky's 1892 commentary. The Agrarian Program's state-socialist character offended many. Of the arguments used against the proposals, one of the most common was that they sacrificed the rural proletariat. While the outrage spread, some party leaders vacillated. Vollmar gave up and went on vacation. But Quarck and David fought on.<sup>6</sup>

Bebel's actions may have contributed to this disapprobation. His preamble to the Agrarian Program crystalized its state-socialist and reformist aura. His insistence that the proposals be embodied in the second part of the Erfurt Program, in contrast to the South-German subcommittee which had wanted a separate statement, exposed the contradiction between the proposals and the first part of the Erfurt Program and thereby raised the question of revising the party's principles. For example, where the Erfurt Program Part One delineated forces leading toward the demise of small-scale production, the amended Part Two would demand measures to preserve the peasants. Where Part One decried privilege, the new Part Two would grant

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<sup>5</sup>Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 154-162; Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 213-217.

<sup>6</sup>Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 174-188. Zimmermann, pp. 180f. See also *Vorwärts*, October 6, 1895, p. 4.

Opposition to the agrarian proposals is recorded in the police report LHAP 9461, Bl. 69-72. Other statements on the controversy are in LHAP 9461, Bl. 7 and 22.

If the party rank and file rejected the Agrarian Program for a reason other than the theoretical principles Engels and Kautsky defended, it need not have been alone the desire to maintain a purely proletarian organization; there was also fear of the Junker monarchy during a period of renewed persecution. See Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 176-179; and later, 107-110.



privileges to those in agriculture. Where Part One emphasized the class struggle of the proletariat, the agrarian proposals in Part Two might have strengthened the state against the workers. Should the Agrarian Program have passed, then there would have existed a contradiction between the party's theory incorporated in the Erfurt Program Part One and the party's new practice embodied in Part Two. Bebel definitely wanted at least some of the proposals defeated. He wrote Engels,

I hope that as you read our peasant program you did not fall from your chair in shock. You understand that it is a compromise. I hope that now thorough criticism will begin and that we throw various things out at the party congress.

To make sure criticism did occur, Bebel asked Kautsky,

And further do me a favor and find a critic who will scrutinize it carefully and really work it over. That Liebk, myself, and other "greats" created it should not stop you from taking hold of it sharply. It is a necessity. Various things must come out; this is possible only when there is criticism from outside.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Bebel to Engels is in Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, p. 215; Bebel to Kautsky is in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Kautsky*, p. 91. Both are also quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 163. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 159-163. Michael Elsner and Edgar Wöltje, "Sozialdemokratie und Agrarfrage 1863-1895," *Ergebnisse*, XIV (1981), 87, distinguish Bebel and Liebknecht's intent from that of other commission members.

#### F. Kautsky and the Agrarian Program

Kautsky responded with the article series "Our Newest Program." The Agrarian Commission could have simply gathered information, he contended, or it could have asked for clarification of principles. Instead, it proposed embodying in the Erfurt Program specific recommendations which contravened the party's revolutionary nature. Yes, social democrats promoted reforms to strengthen the proletariat in its class struggle; the practice was the essence of the Erfurt Program Part Two. But the commission's proposal overlooked the purpose of such reforms, Kautsky charged.

It dissolves fully the distinctiveness of our party. It points out not what separates us from democrats and social reformers but rather what we have in common with them. And thereby it creates the impression that we were a kind of democratic reform party. When we demand political freedoms and rights, we do so, according to the Agrarian Program, not to create the ground on which the proletariat can organize and conquer the state but instead to "democratize all public institutions"; and when we demand social reforms, we do so not to prepare the proletariat for struggle but instead to "improve the existing conditions"!

Was there not a contradiction in wanting democratic improvements within a very undemocratic state? Kautsky exclaimed,

Just think: We are demanding "democratization of all public institutions," for example the election of administrative boards by the people and thus a highly democratic republic, "within the confines of the existing Prussian, Mecklenburg, etc., state constitutions"!<sup>1</sup>

For Kautsky as for Engels and Bernstein, achieving the reforms in the Erfurt Program Part Two would constitute a democratic republic in Germany--replacing the Junker monarchy, not reforming it.

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<sup>1</sup>Kautsky, "Unser neuestes Programm," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIb (1895), 557-562. Summary and commentary on the article are found in Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 107f. Part of the first quotation is also in Salvadori, pp. 53f.

Kautsky attacked the state-socialist tendencies in the Agrarian Program, for example paragraphs 12 and 13 recommending the extension of publicly owned land—of which the arable was to be farmed by the government itself, leased to cooperatives, or rented out to individuals. To Kautsky, these and other paragraphs appealing to the present state violated party principles. The state was a tool of class domination by the capitalists and large landowners. Hence it was absurd to expect the state to end exploitation or to wish to strengthen it against the exploited. Kautsky explained,

So long as the proletariat has not conquered the power of the state, it may demand of this only two kinds of things: first, arrangements which decrease state power vis-à-vis the lower classes but strengthen the influence of these on the state (this is the so-called "democratization" of public institutions); second, institutions which can operate only to the benefit of the proletariat and never against it, institutions which to the extent they increase state power do so not to the disadvantage of the proletariat but instead to that of one of its exploiting and oppressing classes.

To this category of demands, worker-protection legislation belongs first of all. It increases the power of state not vis-à-vis the proletariat but instead vis-à-vis the factory owners.

In contrast, having additional land be administered directly by the government supposedly reinforced it against the proletariat. Kautsky had earlier applauded municipal socialism in countries where the proletariat had some political influence. He repeated this view,

In communities where the proletarians exercise a certain influence, the increase in many forms of communal property will certainly be an advantage. Above all, they will need to seek that as far as possible the community manages its essential tasks itself and takes all actual monopolies—gas and water supply, horse-drawn trams, etc.—from private hands and turns them into its own property.

According to Kautsky, the Agrarian Commission called for something very different. Instead of municipal socialism, the proposals amounted to a return to village communism; instead of corresponding to the modern form of production, they tried to preserve a dying one.

Allegedly, village communism hindered social development, and it provided a foundation for despotism, as in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

Kautsky disliked the demand for production cooperatives supported by the present state. He protested,

This problem occupied our party for decades, until finally at Erfurt it decided with general agreement to drop the demand still found in the Gotha Program for establishing production cooperatives with the help of the existing state. Today the demand suddenly reappears in the program of the agrarian commission.

Kautsky denied hearing good arguments for the demand. He feared that state-supported cooperatives would increase the government's power over the laborers, that in the countryside the cooperatives would create a conservative worker aristocracy, that their failure in the face of agricultural imports and business crises would discredit socialism. If cooperatives should not lease publicly owned land, renting it to individual peasants instead of to capitalist farms would often be economically reactionary, Kautsky warned, preserving the least efficient form of agriculture and the worst living conditions.<sup>3</sup>

Kautsky argued that the fundamental mistake lay in demanding of the present political and social order measures appropriate to a revolutionary transition period when the old system had ended but the new was just beginning. To his way of thinking, it was crucial to limit most demands for actual socialization to this transition period of proletarian rule and to discover other reforms fitting the period before, a concern which soon became central to Bernstein, too. Providing an example, Kautsky maintained that the proposed nationalization of mortgages would make the peasants more dependent on the state, and the state on the capitalists. In contrast, nationalization of mortgages in

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<sup>2</sup>Kautsky, "Unser neuestes Programm," pp. 586-589. The state-socialist aspect of the agrarian question is pointed out by Charles Easton Rothwell, "Rosa Luxemburg and the German Social Democratic Party," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1938, p. 100; G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought* (London, 1954 and 1956), III, 265; and Salvadori, pp. 53-55. See above, 47f. and 61f.

<sup>3</sup>Kautsky, "Unser neuestes Programm," pp. 590-594.

the future would tie the peasants more closely to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.<sup>4</sup>

In a speech in Frankfurt am Main where he had explained the Agrarian Commission's proposals, Quarck had cited Engels's "The Peasant Question" as supposed evidence that Engels had wanted state support for the peasants under the present system of government. The allegation would appear to contradict Engels's belief that peasant agriculture was doomed. Kautsky claimed that there seemed to be a contradiction

for those who do not know to separate clearly two stages: that of the capitalist society and that of the transition to the socialist society. We will not get from the first to the second in one leap. Between the two lies the stage of the so-called Dictatorship of the Proletariat, when the latter has conquered political power but the new form of production is not yet fully developed and implemented. One may believe the stage shorter or longer, but it will certainly form a distinct social situation with special characteristics. And just as the capitalist form of production did not take effect in all areas and branches of production at the same time, the transition to the socialist form of production will also not occur everywhere with equal speed. It may take longest in agriculture, where the capitalist operation is less developed than in industry.

Now Engels differentiated between these two stages and declared: In capitalist society there is absolutely nothing to be done for the peasants. And every promise which even merely creates the impression that we intend the lasting preservation of property in small allotments, as the Agrarian Program of the Commission does, is bad. In contrast, the peasants may well count on our help during the stage of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Kautsky stressed,

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<sup>4</sup>Kautsky, "Unser neuestes Programm," pp. 594 and 610-612. See later, 105, where Bernstein uses Kautsky's distinction and seeks to find reform proposals appropriate to the period before the proletarian political revolution.

Also for Engels the conquest of state power by the proletariat is the precondition for the nationalization of mortgage debts and for state support for agrarian cooperatives. "Within the limits of the existing state and social order" Engels wanted to hear nothing of these measures.<sup>5</sup>

During the agrarian controversy, Kautsky deepened his understanding of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, of its character and place in history.

Kautsky determined that the Agrarian Commission had failed because it had received an impossible assignment:

A social-democratic agrarian program for the capitalist form of production is an impossibility (Unding).

It is condemned from the beginning to be self-contradictory. The more decisively it emphasizes the protection and strengthening of landed property, the more it contradicts the proletarian, revolutionary character of our movement. The more it seeks to avoid this, the more petty, timid, and ineffective its demands must become.

Many of the commission's ideas had been realized in other countries without particularly helping the peasants, Kautsky alleged. He found other proposals economically backward, the rest appropriate only to the future transition to socialism under a social-democratic government.<sup>6</sup>

Kautsky insisted that his position still allowed social democrats to agitate in the countryside. Besides offering to those peasants who understood their economic plight the hope of future cooperative

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<sup>5</sup>Kautsky, "Noch einige Bemerkungen zum Agrarprogramm," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIb (1895), 806-814. With the term "capitalist society" Kautsky here referred to the period before proletarian rule. Kautsky is also quoted by Salvadori, p. 56. Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Das Mandat des Intellektuellen: Karl Kautsky und die Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin, 1986), pp. 110f.

<sup>6</sup>Kautsky, "Unser neuestes Programm," pp. 616-618. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 186. The first sentence of the quotation also appears in Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 108; Salvadori, p. 55; and Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 185.



production, social democrats could offer to the others at least protection as citizens and consumers. The Erfurt Program Part Two applied to the peasants as well as to the rural workers. Kautsky admitted that the Erfurt Program would not win many peasants to socialism, but he maintained that two demographic facts made the circumstance less serious than before. First, that portion of the German population engaged in agriculture had declined. Much as Engels had argued in his 1895 Introduction, Kautsky said that conditions had changed radically in the last 47 years. According to Kautsky, the peasants were not as significant for the revolutionary process as they had been in 1848. Second, among the landowners the largest group numerically were those small peasants forced to seek outside employment; these could be won by appealing to their interests as wage laborers. Organizing the small peasants and the rural proletariat required no new program.<sup>7</sup>

Did Kautsky, then, propose an agrarian program for the SPD? No, if by an agrarian program one understands Vollmar's approach, which would support peasant property under the current political system. Yes, if by an agrarian program one understands Engels's policy of offering the peasants immediate protection as citizens, consumers, and workers and also offering them the prospect under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat of a transition to cooperative production and even of some direct assistance to individuals. For Kautsky, the Erfurt Program already contained Engels's agrarian program, the truly Marxist one.

Of central importance for this agrarian doctrine was the assumption that small-scale production was economically lost, that it was folly to try to preserve the peasants against large-scale competitors. Eduard David denied this assumption, arguing that the experience of industry had not been repeated in agriculture.

In an article for *Neue Zeit*, David illustrated differences between the two kinds of production by using an ideal case of large and small farms differing in size but not in the quality of land, intelligence of the owners, amount of debt, convenience of location, etc. Under these uniform conditions, he claimed, the large-scale agricultural enterprise would not hold the same advantage over the peasant farm that the industrial enterprise had over the craftsman's shop. David observed that agriculture still depended on animal power and that even large estates used hand tools. In agriculture raw

<sup>7</sup>Kautsky, "Unser neuestes Programm," pp. 614-616, 619-624. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 107; and Salvadori, p. 57.

materials could be purchased in small quantities, or obtained in large quantity through cooperatives, or produced on the peasant farm. Products could be sold locally in small units. Peasants remained relatively free of market competition. In general, David believed, the advantages of large-scale production applied less to agriculture because the latter was still dominated by nature. In being self-employed the peasant even enjoyed an advantage, for conditions in agriculture made supervising wage labor difficult. David concluded that the small farm could compete with the large.<sup>8</sup>

In his reply "The Competitiveness of the Small Enterprise in Agriculture," Kautsky first identified a direct challenge to the Erfurt Program: "If comrade David is right, then we must immediately begin reworking our party program, for this then proves to be completely falsely based." However, in Kautsky's opinion, David was wrong; the true comparison required was not between the outmoded estate and the peasant holding but between the latter and the modern capitalist farm. Kautsky remarked that the capitalist enterprise could apply technology and science to agriculture--acquiring advantages in respect to irrigation, drainage, better breeds, animal hygiene, etc.--and that peasants came more and more into direct competition with such farms as taxes, the desire for consumer goods, and the need for tools demanded production for the market. To Kautsky, that peasants were turning to cooperatives showed that they were beginning to see the advantages of modern production. Small peasants could survive through outside employment; indeed, many so-called farms were owned by proletarians trying to raise a little food to supplement their poor wages. Moving beyond the Erfurt Program and his 1892 commentary, Kautsky now reasoned that capitalism could actually contribute to small-scale production:

So under certain conditions the number of dwarf operations grows under the capitalist form of production, with it and because of it, with the large operation, with the proletariat. The small operation draws its life force not from its own ability to compete but from the worker's wage.

<sup>8</sup>Eduard David, "Oekonomische Verschiedenheiten zwischen Landwirtschaft und Industrie," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIb (1895), 449-455. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 164f., also summarizes the article. On p. 167 he presents weaknesses in David's argument.

As in the Erfurt Program commentary, Kautsky mentioned that other peasants survived through overwork and self-sacrifice.<sup>9</sup>

David replied that Kautsky had taken him too far, that he was not willing to predict that small farms could compete successfully against large but only to say that large-scale production did not possess as great an advantage in agriculture as in industry. He felt it unfair for Kautsky to introduce aspects like high indebtedness or lack of education and capital. These factors need not arise from the nature of small-scale production itself. David questioned specific arguments by Kautsky. Then he finished by attempting a *reductio ad absurdum*: Kautsky supposed that small farms would continue as peasants found outside employment; he also expected American grain imports to ruin large-scale agriculture; hence Kautsky implied a future of small farms replacing large-scale production, the exact opposite of the Erfurt Program. David recommended that social democrats study agrarian conditions before jumping to such radical conclusions.<sup>10</sup>

Kautsky retorted that this use of his arguments was at best a humorous joke. Then he added an important, further observation: Since the concentration of capital proceeded at different speeds in different branches of industry and agriculture, one should not conclude that the continued existence of small-scale production in some areas denied capital concentration overall. When capitalist production replaced craftsmen in textiles, mining, and iron, for example, many changed to trade or to some other branch of small-scale production instead of becoming wage laborers.

Thus the development of large-scale industry does not necessarily mean a corresponding decrease in the number of small operations; under certain conditions it can bring about a very considerable increase in this number in a series of branches of production.

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<sup>9</sup>Kautsky, "Die Konkurrenzfähigkeit des Kleinbetriebs in der Landwirtschaft," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIb (1895), 481-491. The quotation from Kautsky is also in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 165, who summarizes the article on pp. 165f. On pp. 167f. Lehmann mentions problems in Kautsky's reply to David. See earlier, 66f.

<sup>10</sup>Eduard David, "Zur Frage der Konkurrenzfähigkeit des landwirtschaftliche Kleinbetriebs," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIb (1895), 678-690. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 168f., also comments on the article.

Similarly, the peasant who could no longer compete in grain might shift to milk, poultry, or fruit.<sup>11</sup> Thus Kautsky implicitly agreed that the model of capital development suggested in the Erfurt Program Part One should not be applied in a one-sided way. After all, the program described *tendencies*. Small-scale production might sometimes be the benefactor of capital expansion rather than its victim.

In his Erfurt Program articles and commentary, Kautsky had portrayed small-scale production as simply doomed, enduring at all only through personal sacrifice or because of special conditions. Then in his first article against David, Kautsky confessed that more opportunities for outside employment might contribute to the survival of peasant farms. Finally Kautsky arrived at the insight that the unexpected resilience of small-scale production in some fields could be the result of capital development elsewhere. Debate had sharpened Kautsky's thinking; but his conclusion contradicted the Erfurt Program Part One when read as an exact prediction or as a description of conditions already fulfilled. Instead of revising the Erfurt Program, however, Kautsky sought how it might still apply if understood as an analytical tool, as identifying tendencies still being realized.

When he had first read the Agrarian Program, Bernstein had also been surprised. He commented to Kautsky, "Something like this has not occurred for a long time. By the way, your answer to David was very good --; now I'll shoot next." Still, Bernstein did not join in the debate at this time. He wrote Kautsky that he felt insecure on the issue and that he needed time to study the facts. Bernstein cautioned Kautsky that in his articles he should have allowed more for the small holding continuing. That land could not be "spatially concentrated" made it least suitable for capitalism. Bernstein did not predict that the peasant farm would always survive; neither did he demand reforms to

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<sup>11</sup>Kautsky, "Ein Nachtrag zu der Diskussion über die Konkurrenzfähigkeit des Kleinbetriebs in der Landwirtschaft," *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 45-52.

General comments on the polemic and its significance are in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 168-174. Here Lehmann maintains that Schönlank's Breslau call for a *revision* of the party's conceptions was connected to David's challenge to the Erfurt Program. See below, 100f.

aid it especially; but he did weigh the possibility that it might last for a very long time, with important consequences for social democracy.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>EB-KK July 30, 1895. EB-KK February 18, 1895; EB-KK May 20, 1895; EB-KK September 16, 1895. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 170f.; the passage includes the Bernstein quotation.

#### G. The Breslau Party Congress

Delegates to the Breslau party congress reassembled at 3:15 on the afternoon of October 8, 1895. Quarck spoke as the first reporter on the agrarian proposals. To dispel suspicions of secrecy or haste, he detailed the procedure followed by the commission. He then addressed the issue of whether the Agrarian Program was truly revolutionary or rather merely reformist by describing it as both. According to Quarck, a necessary economic process led to the end of private property in exploitive capital and to the reuniting of laborers with their means of production. Social democrats should further the process, but they could still improve current conditions in such a way as to prepare for future revolution. Quarck believed that the struggle for reforms could introduce socialist ideas to the peasants, and he mentioned that the food supply was crucial to the workers. Quarck disputed accusations of state socialism, the other key issue. The party already accepted the present government's performing various tasks for the sake of cultural progress, he pointed out. Engels had advocated public aid for the peasants, Quarck alleged; the proposed reforms facilitating social progress also served the proletariat's interests as Kautsky wanted.<sup>1</sup>

After Quarck's speech, the presiding officer, Paul Singer, announced that a resolution had been submitted. It read as follows:

The party congress resolves: The Agrarian Program draft presented by the Agrarian Commission is to be rejected, for the program offers to the peasantry the prospect of improving its circumstances, thus the strengthening of its private property, and contributes thereby to giving new life to its property fanaticism. The program declares the interests of agriculture in the present social order to be an interest of the proletariat, but the interests of agriculture just like the interests of industry under the rule of private property in the means of production are interests of those who possess the means of production, the exploiters of the proletariat.

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<sup>1</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 9, 1895, p. 8. The speech is also found in *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Breslau vom 6. bis 12. Oktober 1895* (Berlin, 1895), pp. 98-104. Hereafter cited as *Protokoll Breslau*. A summary is also in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 191.



Further, the draft of the Agrarian Program gives to the exploiter state new means of power and thereby makes more difficult the class struggle of the proletariat. And finally the draft assigns to the capitalist state tasks which can be carried out usefully only by a state in which the proletariat has conquered political power. The congress recognizes that agriculture has its characteristic laws which are different from those of industry and which should be studied and observed if social democracy is to develop a growing effectiveness in the countryside. Accordingly it commissions the party executive committee, while paying attention to the suggestions already made by the Agrarian Commission, to entrust several qualified persons with the task of thoroughly studying the material available on German agricultural conditions and publishing the results of the study in a series of treatises titled "Collection of Agrarian-Policy Texts of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany." The party executive committee receives authority to spend the money necessary to enable the comrades entrusted with this task to accomplish it.

The proposal was called the Kautsky Resolution.<sup>2</sup>

The second reporter, Max Schippel, ridiculed the commission members and their work. So the next morning (Wednesday, October 9) Bebel replied sharply to the personal attacks; Bebel fumed that he and Schippel were finished. Bebel warned that the agrarian issue was critical to German political life, that the SPD might divide over the question, that one dare not ignore it. The preamble to the Agrarian Program had been dropped, and Bebel did not believe that the proposals themselves contradicted the Erfurt Program. After all, did not the latter also call for reform within the present state and society? Here Bebel overlooked that the Erfurt Program Part Two assumed a distinction between the existing state and the present economy; it implied achieving a new state, a democratic republic, while a mixed economy continued for a time. Bebel denied that artificially preserving the lower property classes was the intent. The natural social process would not be altered. Bebel doubted that the nationalization of mortgages would profit the capitalists in the way Kautsky suggested. If it would, then why had it not been done? Here Bebel moved from the

<sup>2</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 9, 1895, p. 8. Also in *Protokoll Breslau*, pp. 104f. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 198f., summarizes the resolution.

question of economic progress to the one of state socialism. He accused Kautsky of holding the most Manchesterite ideas. Social democrats approved state railroads, Bebel observed. Without specifying proletarian control of the government, he continued,

On this issue we must break with an old prejudice. We must oppose the state-run operation where it becomes hostile to culture and limits development, as has occurred with the military and the police. In all other respects we can have nothing against state operations becoming more important in terms of number and extent and more and more workers becoming dependent on them.

Bebel also appealed to Engels's alleged endorsement of immediate aid to the peasants.<sup>3</sup>

There next occurred one of the great moments in social-democratic intellectual history: Karl Kautsky stepped forward to counter August Bebel. Kautsky agreed that the party needed to seek clarity on the agrarian question. But the proposals did not help:

But a program cannot create clarity where none exists. We undertook the matter backwards. First we posed the basic principles in Frankfurt; today we only want to create a program; and then we wish to begin study of the agrarian question. The reverse, it seems, would have been better.

His resolution was to provide opportunity to research the issue first. Kautsky explained that he had once said that the "proletarian cause was the cause of progress." Now Quarck reversed this to say that supporting progress helped the proletariat. Kautsky contended that the reversal was inaccurate. It overlooked the central purpose of truly

<sup>3</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 9, 1895, pp. 8 and 4; *Vorwärts*, October 10, 1895, pp. 5f. Bebel's address is also found in *Protokoll Breslau*, pp. 105-110 and 112-124. Above, 28 and 88. Short summaries of the speeches by Quarck, Schippel, and Bebel are found in Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 109.

social-democratic reform efforts--preparing the workers for the conquest of political power.<sup>4</sup>

Kautsky thought that the first rural group the SPD should approach were the laborers with little or no land. Attracting the peasants would be more difficult because of their attachment to private property, but there were fewer of them. In respect to thinking about peasants and craftsmen in the same way, Kautsky said that he stood on Engels's position. Kautsky insisted that the party should tell the peasants the truth that the mode of production caused their desperate condition and hence that their only hope was socialism. The party had grown strong by forthrightly speaking the truth, he claimed. In contrast,

If we went to the peasants with the Agrarian Program, we would cut into our own flesh. First we explain to them the first part of the Erfurt Program; we say their situation is hopeless, there is no way to help them; and then we say we want to help them with the Agrarian Program.

Here Kautsky recognized the danger of building a contradiction of theory and practice into the Erfurt Program. As he had done earlier, Kautsky distinguished between "worker protection" (*Arbeiterschutz*, safeguarding the person of the individual laborer) and "peasant protection" (*Bauernschutz*, preserving the peasant's private property and economic condition). Social democrats would not have the state intervene in the natural processes of the capitalist economy--neither to guard workers from sub-minimum wages and unemployment nor to maintain peasants on their land. Small-scale agricultural production ruined people, Kautsky believed. Instead of trying to preserve it, one should seek reforms to enhance the peasant's or laborer's personal life; demands for this purpose were already available in the Erfurt Program. Kautsky countered Quarck's interpretation of Engels. He challenged Bebel's support for government enterprises. He cautioned,

Bebel's remarks show what a steep slope we have come upon. If we must act positively in the agrarian question, then the only thing left for us is state socialism. I am not

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<sup>4</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 10, 1895, p. 6. Kautsky's remarks are also to be read in *Protokoll Breslau*, p. 124. A short summary of Kautsky's reply to Bebel is in Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 109f.

criticizing the commission for having had the courage to attempt to solve a problem which is unsolvable. We must not condemn the commission, but we must not follow it either. (Lively applause.)<sup>5</sup>

On the following morning (Thursday, October 10), leaders spoke for or against the Agrarian Program. David disputed specific points made by Schippel or Kautsky. Zetkin echoed Kautsky's views on the difference between worker protection and peasant protection. Social democrats sought to strengthen the proletariat for the class struggle, she declared; they did not try to guarantee the laborer's income. Zetkin judged that many of the proposed reforms would be appropriate under a revolutionary government but that at present they would lead to state socialism. She believed that government employees were more tightly controlled than those in private firms and that nationalization of mortgages would reinforce the capitalist state, made worse by a large bureaucracy and by militarism. Zetkin finished by expressing concern about the rise of reformism in the party.<sup>6</sup>

Liebkecht responded by claiming to agree with Zetkin on theory, while himself still supporting the agrarian proposals; in his opinion, every member of the commission agreed with the theory of Zetkin and Kautsky. Liebkecht thought that large-scale capitalist production would replace small. "But that which occupies us at all congresses and everywhere takes our time, that is the practical

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<sup>5</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 10, 1895, pp. 6f. One might also consult *Protokoll Breslau*, pp. 124-127. Kautsky, "Arbeiterschutz und Bauernschutz," *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 19-21.

That Kautsky did not wish to attack Bebel is reflected in a letter from Kautsky to his wife Luise on October 7, 1895: "The people think I have come with a big speech in my belly; that is not agreeable. But, what shall I do? August sits this time with the Bavarians, he is the 'Statthalter' of the 'Bauernkönig' of Bavaria, Jörg [Vollmar]." This is in *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Kautsky*, p. 95 note 3; there it is in English. See also Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 11, 1895, pp. 5f. Also in *Protokoll Breslau*, pp. 132-143. Tschubinski, p. 303. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 193.

questions," he insisted.<sup>7</sup> Where other defenders of the Agrarian Program like Bebel, David, and Quarc had argued that it was compatible with the party's theory, Liebknecht's remark suggested further that the proposals could not violate theory because they concerned only practice, a different matter.

When the delegates gathered that afternoon, speaking time was limited to ten minutes. Schönlink protested but then made perhaps the most significant speech of all:

It is characteristic and for me it was self-evident that through such differences of opinion a division into two camps must occur. For the psychologist, for the historian it is indeed very instructive to see how these groups have formed and what kind of people stand on the one side or the other. It is a symptom of the reconstruction of concepts in the party, and only those who do not wish to see will believe that things can continue on the old beaten path. The party's way of seeing things is caught up in reconstruction. We have stopped being a party merely of the industrial proletariat. Social democracy is the party of all those oppressed like the proletariat, all those who suffer; but the policies it wishes to carry out remain industrial-worker policies. (Laughter.) Laughter is no refutation. Facts prove. The revision of our perceptions proceeds without stopping, and it is again indicative of the fact that dogmatism in the party has already become so strong. Class consciousness cannot be denied of large groups of the rural proletariat.

You will realize that we will now have to deal in a very powerful way with the agrarian question, with new concepts, with new goals. Agriculture does not allow itself to be handled according to the old schemas (Schablonen), which until now have so often assumed the place of research and knowledge. Party fanaticism and dogmatism are much worse than the property fanaticism of the small peasants. Moreover, party dogmatism is in no way the result of the materialist conception of history. Marx and Engels would say "thanks for nothing" to their views being treated dogmatically, as has occurred. Engels has just said in a recently published letter

<sup>7</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 11, 1895, pp. 6f. Also in *Protokoll Breslau*, pp. 143f. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 194; Tschubinski, p. 303.

that precisely the Marxists have often falsely understood Marx. In accord with changed conditions we must also change our tactic. That section of the party which will not hear of innovations is conservative; the other section is revolutionary. (Very true; laughter.) Today you laugh; in a few years perhaps you will already be sad.<sup>8</sup>

Schönlink had explicitly mentioned both a revision of the party's concepts and also the formation of two factions in the party. Some scholars have plausibly understood the Agrarian Question as one origin of revisionism in the SPD.<sup>9</sup>

However, Schönlink's speech may have another significance. Schönlink stipulated that his comment on the revision of concepts applied only to the agrarian question and to "revolution in the correct sense of the word," not to the party's principles. Moreover, he argued that it was the revolutionaries who would seek new ideas; and he wanted the correct use of Marx, in place of a dogmatic interpretation

<sup>8</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 11, 1895, p. 7. Also in *Protokoll Breslau*, p. 152. Schönlink's reference to a revision of perceptions is quoted by Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Zur Ideologie der Partei vor dem 1. Weltkrieg* (Hanover, 1967), p. 89 note 2; much of the speech is in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 192f.

In his letter to Joseph Bloch on September 21-22, 1890, Engels talked of Marxists who misunderstood Marxism. See *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York, 1972), p. 642. The letter was published in the *Sozialistischer Akademiker* on October 1, 1895; *Marx-Engels Werke*, XXXVII, 465. So could it perhaps have been to this letter that Schönlink was referring on October 10? Compare also Engels's letter to Kautsky of August 12, 1892, quoted below, 117.

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 220f. and 258. In note 97 on p. 199, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism. Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1962), Peter Gay mentions Bernstein's citing the agrarian debate as contributing to his movement toward revisionism.



of him.<sup>10</sup> So another question raised in Schönlanck's speech was that of how one should understand and apply Marxism: Creatively, as a method to analyze actual material conditions? Or rather dogmatically, as a prediction of how society would necessarily change? Significantly in this respect, supporters of the Agrarian Program like Quarck, Bebel, Liebknecht, and Vollmar assumed a necessary economic evolution ending small-scale production. It was Kautsky who allowed for counter-tendencies in the historical process.<sup>11</sup>

On October 11, after two and one half days of debate, the Breslau congress voted. The Kautsky Resolution was amended to remove reference to the peasants' alleged "property fanaticism"; then it was passed 158 to 63. Even among the 63 nays there were those who opposed the agrarian proposals but who disliked the Kautsky Resolution too. For Kautsky the decision was a substantial victory; for Bebel, Liebknecht, and the commission, a major defeat.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 11, 1895, pp. 4 and 7. Also in *Protokoll Breslau*, pp. 152 and 162. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 193; Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, p. 145 note 108.

<sup>11</sup>Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 193, implies that Schönlanck claimed that his remarks against dogmatism were directed at Kautsky.

<sup>12</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 12, 1895, pp. 5f. Also in *Protokoll Breslau*, pp. 176f. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 199f.

#### H. The Agrarian Question After Breslau

Following the Breslau party congress, social democrats could not agree whether the Kautsky Resolution merely rejected the specific Agrarian Program presented or rather blocked developing any agrarian program at all. Bebel had concluded his key speech warning that the Kautsky Resolution would stop work on the issue. In a letter to Adler shortly after the congress, Bebel denied the opinion that Kautsky's resolution called for further study leading to new proposals. Bebel wrote that the social-democratic position in the countryside and in the provincial diets would be hurt and that there would be no guidelines with which to set limits on the Bavarians.<sup>1</sup>

This interpretation of the Resolution probably troubled Kautsky. On the one hand, he had favored an agrarian program like the one of Engels; he had not meant to ignore the peasants. On the other hand, Kautsky was dissatisfied with his resolution. He apparently confessed to Bernstein that it was not entirely what he had intended.<sup>2</sup>

Hence Kautsky tried again to publicize his views, this time in a *Neue Zeit* article the week after the party congress. He repeated that the Erfurt Program allowed for immediate assistance to the peasants and insisted that his resolution did not prevent it.

The resolution does not make impossible practical action for the peasantry in general; rather, only a certain kind of it is rejected: acting in the direction of protecting the peasant form of production, that is, the peasant private property in land. With this rejection a practical reform effort for the agricultural population is as little excluded as practical reform work for the industrial population is excluded by the rejection of protection for craftsmen.

We cannot and may not hinder the proletarianization of the peasantry, but we can well act toward its happening in the least brutal ways possible. To this activity Engels has already referred in the article so often quoted at the party congress.

<sup>1</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 10, 1895, p. 6. Bebel to Adler October 20, 1895, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 194f. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 207, quotes Bebel's letter to Adler.

<sup>2</sup>EB-KK October 26, 1895; quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 206.

For Kautsky there was a difference between reforms to preserve the peasants' form of production (that is, stopping their proletarianization) and reforms to improve their condition of life in certain respects (that is, halting their impoverishment); accomplishing the latter might even threaten the former. For example, lengthening the school day might raise the quality of life for the peasant's children while imperiling the farm's economic existence. In contrast, a peasant's losing his land and becoming a factory worker could eventually mean a rise in his standard of living.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, socialists could support certain forms of nationalization, but not others. Kautsky explained,

What all state socialists have in common and what separates them from social democracy is the fact that they already expect from the present state the carrying out of measures which are intended to transform the capitalist form of production, to give it a more or less socialist character.

Social democracy in contrast declares it to be utopian under the present state and through it to wish to transform the capitalist form of production. From the social-democratic standpoint this is also not at all necessary. For the ruling form of production itself is that which yields the preconditions of the socialist society--on the one hand large-scale production, . . . and on the other hand the proletariat.

In contrast, those groups must tend toward state socialism which well recognize the correctness of the socialist critique but which do not wish to hear of the conquest of political power by the proletariat; but likewise also those groups for whom the economic and political development proceeds too slowly and who wish to force it. They wish to bring about socialist institutions already under a capitalist state and with the help of the latter.

Kautsky affirmed that his resolution at Breslau condemned state socialism.

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<sup>3</sup>Kautsky, "Der Breslauer Parteitag und die Agrarfrage," *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 108-111. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 204f., also discusses the article. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 206.

But it does not say at all that every nationalization of economic institutions and functions in the present state is taboo. There is a group of such institutions and functions whose nationalization is necessary already in the capitalist state, not as a means to transform the existing form of production but as a means to meet its own needs. Such acts of nationalization--e.g., of the railroads and the large central banks--signify neither an attempt to check the economic development nor an attempt to jump a stage of it and through artificial means to create organizational forms belonging to a new society before its preconditions are fully developed.<sup>4</sup>

In the Marxism of Kautsky and Bernstein, social change was a determined process in which stages of development could not be skipped. Almost ironically, the SPD could promote acts of nationalization which furthered capitalism but must oppose nationalization as a way of achieving socialism before the proletariat had taken political power and capitalism was adequately advanced.

In letters in October, 1895, Bernstein approved Kautsky's *Neue Zeit* commentary on his Breslau resolution. After suggesting that the SPD was too focused on parliamentary work, Bernstein contended,

For practical purposes we are really just a radical party--i.e., we do no more than what on the other side bourgeois radical parties do. It is also . . . impossible any other way, only we most often hide it from ourselves and use a language which is out of proportion to our actions and to our power.

According to Bernstein, because of its language the party had overlooked the key issue: Given their present limited circumstances, social democrats could not win the peasants as party members; but the SPD would need them as allies. Instead, the "agrarians" wanted state socialism, and it was good that Kautsky defeated them. Bebel's whole approach had been wrong, Bernstein thought. It was illogical to propose aid for the peasants and then to claim that they were vanishing. Bebel should have tried to justify peasant aid not theoretically, but opportunistically. Moreover, Bernstein doubted that the peasants as a class were disappearing so quickly. He reminded

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<sup>4</sup>Kautsky, "Der Breslauer Parteitag und die Agrarfrage," *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 111f. Commentary is in Salvadori, p. 56.

Kautsky that Engels had said that capitalism affected agriculture last of all.<sup>5</sup>

Bernstein commented that Schönlanck's speech at Breslau included several good points he would have wanted to raise himself, had he been there. However, there were parts of the speech Bernstein did not like; so it is difficult to discover just which ideas he approved or how he understood them.<sup>6</sup> Did he condemn dogmatic Marxists opposed to the agrarian proposals, because he preferred a program of piecemeal social and economic reforms in cooperation with the existing state? Or rather, did Bernstein merely agree with Schönlanck that one should carefully use historical materialism to analyze facts instead of turning Marxism into a schema of the way history would occur? In struggling with these alternatives, one might ask whether Bernstein would have written Kautsky favorably about Schönlanck's speech against dogmatism had he judged Kautsky himself to be the guilty party. On the other hand, the supporters of the Agrarian Program interpreted Marx in a manner allowing them to make predictions.

The agrarian question did contribute to Bernstein's intellectual development in the mid-1890's. It challenged him to use historical materialism in a creative fashion to discover why the peasantry was surviving and to examine the implications of this phenomenon for social democracy. Bernstein would need to ask what might happen if the SPD took political power while the peasants were still numerous; what it should do during the therefore long transition from capitalism into socialism; and what steps it should take to prepare for the future transformation even now as the workers gained political influence.

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<sup>5</sup>EB-KK October 21, 1895; EB-KK October 26, 1895; and the undated, unmarked fragment from Bernstein to Kautsky probably written between October 1 and 15, 1895, and filed in the Kautsky Papers between DV 290 and DV 291, IISH. See also EB-KK ca. November 4, 1895 (DV 344); EB-KK November 14, 1895; and EB-KK December 5, 1895. The quotation is from EB-KK October 21, 1895; also quoted in Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 220f. See above, 87f.

<sup>6</sup>EB-KK October 21, 1895.

# I. Persecution

The Breslau party congress took place amidst increased oppression. The end of the Anti-Socialist Laws five years before had not signaled toleration. The government searched for ways to continue fighting the SPD; and some officials thought that it could be done as well without the Anti-Socialist Laws. Emperor Wilhelm II proposed the "New Course" of assistance for the laborers to win them away from the SPD; and reforms were weighed in respect to how much they would damage the party. Then, after the social democrats showed yet greater strength in the 1893 Reichstag elections, the government intensified repression. Measures contemplated included both a coup d'état and ending the present Reichstag suffrage. The so-called "revolution bill" (Umsturzvorlage) was introduced, intended to reinforce the criminal and military codes and laws on the press in order to punish more easily those supposedly threatening the state or disparaging religion, the monarchy, the family, or property. When Chancellor Caprivi disagreed with such proposals and with higher food tariffs, he was replaced by Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst.<sup>7</sup>

Introduced into the Reichstag on December 6, 1894, the "revolution bill" met widespread protest. The bill threatened the freedom of expression of many Germans, not just socialists, and it was eventually defeated on May 11, 1895.<sup>8</sup> Still, other repressive acts proceeded, based on alleged disparagement of the Emperor.

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<sup>7</sup>*Histoire Générale du Socialisme*, Jacques Droz, ed. (Paris, 1974), II, 38; Gerhard A. Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, pp. 35-40; Tschubinski, p. 300; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, pp. 60 and 102; Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 171 and 210; William H. Maehl, *August Bebel. Shadow Emperor of the German Workers* (Philadelphia, 1981), p. 286; Pierre Angel, *Eduard Bernstein et l'Évolution du Socialisme Allemand* (Paris, 1961), p. 113; and *Vorwärts*, October 5, 1895, p. 9.

On the use of reforms to win workers away from the SPD, see ZSAP, Reichskanzlei, Nr. 432, Bl. 2f.; and Reichskanzlei, Nr. 646/10, Bl. 11.

<sup>8</sup>Hesselbarth, *Revolutionäre Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 210f.; Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 143; Tschubinski, p. 297. It was in light of this bill that Engels's Introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850* was edited. See above, 56.



At the opening of the Reichstag in December 1894, Liebknecht had accidentally remained in the chamber during the cheer for the Emperor, instead of leaving as was the social-democratic custom. Liebknecht stayed seated and was accordingly threatened with prosecution for lese majesty.<sup>9</sup> A year later he was convicted on a similar charge, because of events transpiring in the late summer of 1895. At that time social democrats opposed the national observances marking the 25th anniversary of the victory at Sedan in the Franco-Prussian War. A socialist leaflet protested the expense for celebrating a battle in which thousands died and a war fought not in self-defense but for foreign conquest. It criticized the German Reich that arose from the war. Upon the anniversary of Sedan, in September 1895, Wilhelm II referred to the social democrats as a "gang of people unworthy to bear the name Germans" and as a "high treasonous band." Then the government launched a campaign of prosecutions of social democrats for lese majesty; perhaps half the *Vorwärts* staff went to jail. In mid-September Bebel wrote Adler,

We are sitting on a powder keg. I do not think that the current shouting will be followed by any serious results, but it is a symptom of the situation. The hatred is climbing and the fear and it needs only some push, which we ourselves certainly do not have to give, and we are facing a catastrophe. Then everything is in question.

Again Bebel visualized his imminent political Kladderadatsch. Singer warned Adler not to attend the Breslau party congress for fear of his being arrested.<sup>10</sup>

In his opening speech to the party congress, Liebknecht replied to the recent persecution.

<sup>9</sup>Tschubinski, pp. 296f. Bebel to Adler December 12, 1894, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 168f. Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 168f. note 31.

<sup>10</sup>Wilhelm II is quoted in Tschubinski, p. 302. Bebel to Adler September 18, 1895, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 188; Singer to Adler September 27, 1895, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 191. *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, ed. (Berlin, 1974), Ser. I, Vol. III, no. 246, pp. 427-434.

Under the protection of the state power one insults social democracy, under the protection of the state power one throws the party the gauntlet to fight for life or death. All right. As for the insults to our party, we stand too high for them to reach us. (Lively applause.)

Liebknecht was found guilty of lese majesty not because he had actually accused the Emperor of something wrong but, according to *Vorwärts*, because someone present might have misunderstood him that way. *Vorwärts* cited the opinion of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*:

If this form of interpretation of the lese majesty paragraph and the provisions for punishment of insults finds any further development, if it should even become the rule, then the end is not in sight, then no one is actually protected any more from such lawsuits.<sup>11</sup>

Then on Monday, November 25, police raided the offices of *Vorwärts*, the offices of the SPD executive committee, and homes of social-democratic leaders apparently to search for evidence that the party violated paragraphs 8 and 16 of the Prussian law on organizations. A legal process was brought against the executive committee and others, but they were eventually found innocent. *Vorwärts* alleged that the organizational structure of many bourgeois groups in North Germany violated the 1850 ordinance. The newspaper claimed that the SPD, more than any other party, had tried to fulfill the law.<sup>12</sup>

Dozens of social-democratic writers, editors, and others were sent to jail. *Vorwärts* regularly published a register of processes for lese majesty, along with detailed reports on the exceptional cases. The Interior Ministry instructed the Berlin police to

<sup>11</sup>*Vorwärts*, October 8, 1895, p. 4; in *Protokoll Breslau*, p. 68, the passage with Liebknecht's speech omits reference to the "state power." *Vorwärts*, November 15, 1895, p. 1; *Vorwärts*, November 19, 1895, p. 2. Tschubinski, p. 302. When Simon Katzenstein reported on the Liebknecht case in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, he too was prosecuted for lese majesty; *Vorwärts*, November 24, 1895, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>*Vorwärts*, November 26, 1895, p. 1; November 27, p. 1; December 3, 1895, p. 1; March 9, 1897, p. 1. Tschubinski, pp. 304f. Lehmann, *Agrarfrage*, p. 210. Maehl, *August Bebel*, p. 294.

gather information on foreign journalists of newspapers critical of the state--information on morals, political activities, things which might justify deportation.<sup>13</sup> In a period of such persecution, proposals for reformism and state socialism--i.e., for achieving socialist goals through cooperation with the existing government--may have seemed very out of place.

Scholars have suggested several possible causes for revisionism. Among them are these five: a desire to cooperate with the government on reform work after the "New Course" in 1890, a wish to expand the social-democratic movement beyond the industrial proletariat, the observation that conditions in agriculture did not fit Marx's prediction of capital concentration, a similarly unexpected rise in the proletariat's standard of living, and Engels's death allowing Bernstein to attack the ideas of his mentor. We have just seen that the "New Course" was succeeded later by renewed oppression. Nonetheless, Kautsky like Bernstein allowed for certain kinds of state enterprises. We have also seen that Kautsky followed Engels in endorsing reforms for the peasants as citizens and consumers in the present and even as landowners under a Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Bernstein proposed considering merely an alliance with the peasants. We have further seen how the supporters of the Agrarian Program predicted a necessary decline in the number of small holdings, while Kautsky and possibly Bernstein supposed that one could pursue an authentically Marxist study of why small-scale agricultural production endured. Finally, we have seen that Kautsky like Bernstein denied that Marxism required the necessary impoverishment of the proletariat. Peasants might improve

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<sup>13</sup>ZSAM, Ministerium des Innern, Rep. 77, Tit. 240, Nr. 19, Bl. 15: request from the Minister of the Interior to the Berlin chief of police for information on foreign journalists employed by newspapers opposed to the state. Bl. 56 of February 24, 1900, contains the following entry on Kautsky:

K. is a well known follower of the Social-Democratic Party and the publisher of the socialist review *Neue Zeit* appearing in Stuttgart; since July 13, 1897, he has resided in Friedenau and from there directed the editing of the aforementioned journal.

Since 1880 K. has been active in speaking and writing on behalf of social democracy; otherwise nothing objectionable about him is known. He lives in Friedenau, Hauffstraße 11.

their lot by becoming wage laborers. Next we shall see how following Engels's death Bernstein at first sought to defend his deceased friend's ideas, to defend them against Liebknecht's admirers in England.

### Chapter Three: British Politics (Autumn 1895)

#### A. Engels, Liebknecht, and the SDF, 1881-1895

By October 1888 Bernstein had arrived in London, and by the spring of 1889 he was under attack from the Social Democratic Federation. That this animosity arose so quickly should not surprise us: Bernstein was a close follower of Engels, and Engels had long criticized the SDF. In his opinion many things were wrong with the group—ironically, for many people the representative of Marxism in Great Britain.

When Henry Mayers Hyndman launched the Democratic Federation in 1881, the Liberal Party still possessed a strong Radical wing which the trade unions would not abandon. The Democratic Federation (which became the SDF in 1883), like other British socialist groups during the 1880's, lacked mass support from the workers. It was more an association of middle-class politicians and intellectuals.<sup>1</sup>

This condition posed a serious problem. Engels, Bernstein, and Kautsky understood Marxism as the theory of the proletariat's self-emancipation; to be a Marxist meant to join with and to guide the labor movement in its various manifestations—trade unions, cooperatives, and eventually an independent political party. But Hyndman wanted a new party immediately; so he needed to understand socialism in a different way. In effect, he questioned the proletariat's leading role in its emancipation and—in the eyes of Engels, Bernstein, and Kautsky—turned Marxism into a sectarian creed. Hyndman's thought alternated between revolution as violent uprising and revolution as non-violent evolution. He warned the ruling classes and government of rebellion if reforms for the workers were not forthcoming. He favored state socialism and held ideas similar to the Lassalleans' "iron law of wages" and "one reactionary mass." He sternly opposed the Liberal Party and had little regard for the trade unions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought* (London, 1954-56), II, 390 and 397; Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H. M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (London, 1961), pp. 46f.; and Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford, 1965), pp. 23 and 45.

<sup>2</sup>Siegfried B nger, *Friedrich Engels und die britische sozialistische Bewegung von 1881-1895* (Berlin, 1962), pp. 51f., 62f., 69, and 106; Pelling, pp. 46, 57, 60, 79, 92, 98, and 173; Stanley



Thus, Hyndman's understanding of the proletariat's formation in capitalism and of its role in a democratic republic and in the arrival of socialism differed from that of mature Marxism. From the perspective of Kautsky and Bernstein, Hyndman was utopian in a different sense, in his arbitrary picture of how history would progress toward socialism.

In the 1880's Engels countered notions found in the SDF. In 1881 he argued in a British labor newspaper that in England democracy implied proletarian rule and that to prepare for rule the proletariat should seek to elect workers to Parliament. In the mid-1880's Hyndman was involved with a demonstration of unemployed which became violent; Engels thought that it posed an affront to the real proletariat. In 1886 in his Foreword to the English edition of *Capital*, Engels shared Marx's belief that in England a peaceful transition to proletarian rule was possible, though the new government might then be threatened with overthrow.<sup>3</sup>

However, as serious as was the difference between Engels and Hyndman over theory, their personal hostility may have been greater. It appears that a number of socialists had difficulty working with Hyndman. In 1911 George Bernard Shaw recalled, "Hyndman has charming manners and is the worst leader that ever drove his followers into every other camp—even into the Cabinet—to escape from his leadership." Engels reacted negatively to Hyndman's perceived haughtiness, reporting to Bernstein on October 27, 1882, about the "many little democrats" in London. Engels continued,

Their newest central head or . . . head chief is a lawyer Hyndman, a strong democratic place-hunter and Parliament candidate defeated in the last elections. All these little people

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Pierson, *British Socialists. The Journey From Fantasy to Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 26f.; Henry Collins, "The Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation," in *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923*, Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds. (Archon Books, 1971), p. 64.

On Hyndman's debt to Lassalle see Tsuzuki, pp. 31f. and 55f. That Hyndman wanted peaceful change is argued on pp. 34, 37, and 39-42. On p. 77 Tsuzuki explains that Hyndman did not advocate revolution but saw the threat of revolution as a political lever.

<sup>3</sup>Bünger, pp. 29 and 133f.; Gustav Mayer, *Friedrich Engels* (The Hague, 1934), II, 405f. *Marx-Engels Werke*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, ed. (Berlin, 1957ff.), XIX, 278, and XXIII, 40. Collins, pp. 43f.; Tsuzuki, p. 74; Pelling, pp. 42f. and 53. Above, 59.

have no one behind them except each other. They break up into all kinds of sects and into the non-sectarian general democratic giddiness. The important thing is to show the world how important one is. . . . Good will is richly present in most of them, but also good will to play a role.

It did not help matters that Engels believed that Hyndman had failed to cite Marx properly in an 1881 publication.<sup>4</sup>

Hence Engels may have taken some pleasure in the double debacle which befell the SDF in 1884 and 1885. First Edward Aveling, Ernest Belfort-Bax, and William Morris seceded to form the Socialist League. Engels wrote to Bernstein, "One will finally operate modestly, proportional to one's strength, and no longer behave as if the English proletariat must immediately fall in when a few intellectuals turn to socialism and blow roll-call." For the new group Engels recommended a program including involvement with elections, trade unions, and cooperatives. However, the Socialist League took a different course. It eventually became anarchistic and dismissed labor reforms.<sup>5</sup>

Then in 1885 another group departed after the SDF had taken money from the Conservatives to run candidates against the Liberals. Engels condemned this "Tory Gold" scandal in a letter to Bernstein on December 7, 1885:

. . . H [Hyndman] knew that taking money from the Tories meant nothing else than totally ruining the socialists morally in the eyes of the single class from which they can recruit, namely the great masses of Radical workers.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Shaw is quoted by James W. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London. A Study of Five Unorthodox Socialists* (Oxford, 1970), p. 15. Bernstein, *Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels*, Helmut Hirsch, ed. (Assen, 1970), pp. 145f. Other comments by Engels about Hyndman are on pp. 95, 239, 252, and 289; all are negative remarks. Mayer, II, 404; Hulse, pp. 14f.; Bünger, pp. 48f.; G. D. H. Cole, II, 395; Pelling, pp. 28f. and 30f.

<sup>5</sup>Bernstein, *Briefwechsel mit Engels*, p. 315. Bünger, p. 82; Pelling, p. 55.

<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, *Briefwechsel mit Engels*, p. 331. G. D. H. Cole, II, 403; Pelling, pp. 40f.

Engels desired that the SDF dissolve even more before the workers in England wanted an authentic social-democratic party. The preconditions for this turn of events emerged around the year 1886 when Joseph Chamberlain abandoned the Liberals, leaving some of his former followers to seek a new, alternative direction. About the same time, London's unskilled laborers were being organized, leading to the formation of the New Unions and to the Dock Strike, the Gas Workers Strike, and May Day 1890. In the Dock Strike, Engels saw the rebirth of the British labor movement. He endorsed the New Unions in his Foreword to the 1891 English edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. A workers' party independent of the Liberals emerged in 1888 in the Scottish Labour Party of James Keir Hardie. Formation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) followed in 1893. Significantly, Eduard Bernstein attended its founding convention.<sup>7</sup>

Leaders of the SDF took Liebknecht's struggle in Germany as an inspiration for their own in Great Britain. Liebknecht repeatedly sided with the SDF, sometimes against Engels and Bernstein. One example concerned the 1889 Paris Congress of the Second International. In February of that year, Bebel and Liebknecht were forced to choose between supporting the international labor congress called by the French Marxists or seeking to combine that meeting with the one called by the French Possibilists. Engels favored the former congress; Hyndman, the latter one. In March 1889 Bernstein replied to an article in *Justice* with a brochure which criticized the SDF and the Possibilists and which countered accusations of intrigue on the part of Engels and the SPD leaders. Because Liebknecht sought to have one congress, on April 4 Engels wrote him that he did not understand the situation in England and that Bernstein did so much better. Finally, Liebknecht acquiesced and backed the French Marxists. Both congresses took place

<sup>7</sup>Mayer, II, 404-407; G. D. H. Cole, II, 390; Bünger, pp. 168-172; L. F. Ilyichov and others, *Friedrich Engels. A Biography*, Victor Schreier, tr. (Moscow, 1974), p. 401. Pelling, pp. 53, 85-87, 118. On pp. 71 and 123, Pelling observes that the principles of Keir Hardie in the formation of the ILP fit with Engels's vision for the beginning of an English workers' party.

that summer, Hyndman attending the one while the SPD participated in the other.<sup>8</sup>

The deep enmity between Engels and Bernstein on the one side and Hyndman and the SDF on the other continued into the next decade. In June 1892, just before the parliamentary elections, Engels tallied Hyndman's troubles for Bebel: *Justice* was losing money; the SDF failed to grow as fast as the socialist movement in general; and it could not compete with the Fabians. Engels did not want Hyndman's friendship. Engels doubted that Hyndman had any chance of electoral victory. On August 12, 1892, Engels wrote Kautsky,

The SDF is really just a pure sect. They have ossified Marxism into a dogma; and since they push away every workers' movement which is not orthodox Marxist (and in addition, Marxism with much misunderstanding), that is, since they carry out precisely the opposite of the policy recommended in the *Manifesto*, they make it impossible for them to become anything other than a sect.<sup>9</sup>

Still, Liebknecht continued to recognize the SDF as the Marxist party in Great Britain, repeating its interpretation of politics there,

<sup>8</sup>Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel mit Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels*, Georg Eckert, ed. (The Hague, 1963), p. 328. Bünger, pp. 142-152; Wadim Tschubinski, *Wilhelm Liebknecht. Eine Biographie*, Bernhard Jahnel, tr. (Berlin, 1973), pp. 248f.; Tsuzuki, pp. 114-116. On p. 114 Tsuzuki attributes the conflict between the two groups to the issue of whether the whole congress or each national delegation would determine mandates; Hyndman favored the latter. Mayer refers to the controversy in *Friedrich Engels*, II, pp. 392-394; it is summarized in a note in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Friedrich Adler, ed. (Vienna, 1954), pp. 245f.

<sup>9</sup>Engels's letter to Kautsky of August 12, 1892, is quoted in Bünger, p. 191. LHAP 13033, Bl. 167-173: police report on the London social democrats, dated December 3, 1890; see particularly Bl. 171f. "Briefe über den Erfurter Parteitag," Brigitte Rieck, ed., *Beiträge*, VIII (1966), 1001 and note 17. *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels*, Werner Blumenberg, ed. (London, 1965), pp. 545f. See later, 148 and 286-288.

which was also his own. Writing to Bebel on July 3, 1892, Engels called *Vorwärts's* reports on the elections "colossal stupidity."

The England of *Vorwärts* exists only in the phantasy of the writer. The opinion that the Tories today are better for the workers than the Liberals is the opposite of the reality. On the contrary, all the Manchester prejudices of the Liberals of 1850 are creeds only with the Tories today, while the Liberals know very well that for them it is a matter of getting the workers' vote if they want to continue as a party. . . . The Tories are no longer merely the fashion of the great landlords as until 1850; the sons of the Cobdens, Brights, and the great bourgeois and anti-corn-law people all went over to the Tory camp between 1855 and 1870; and Liberals have their strength now in the non-state-church lower and middle bourgeois.<sup>10</sup>

To this way of thinking, it was wrong for *Vorwärts* to interpret the elections as if they were occurring between the liberal and conservative parties of Germany or as if British conditions had remained unchanged for forty years. Far from being the party of the capitalists, the Liberals now represented the lower middle classes, laborers, and religious nonconformists—sometimes with socialist ideas.

Keir Hardie's victory in 1892 particularly pleased Engels. On July 7 he wrote Bebel,

Wonderful irony of world history: each of the two old parties must appeal to the workers, make concessions to the workers, in order to remain at the helm or to get at it; and in this each feels that precisely in doing this it is helping its successor into the saddle. And yet they cannot do otherwise! What is our little humor compared to the colossal humor which breaks through in the historical development!<sup>11</sup>

Engels could enjoy the "humorous" way in which the historical process advanced socialism in England—through the existing parties and labor

<sup>10</sup>*Bebels Briefwechsel mit Engels*, p. 554.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 555 and 559f.

organizations and almost despite anyone's plan—because for him Marxism was the analysis and affirmation of this historical evolution.

Later in July Engels complained to Bernstein about Liebknecht's handling of the elections. Engels predicted that Gladstone would need to reform the suffrage, increasing the number of worker votes. "Thus an excellent situation for us." Bernstein also thought that the Liberal Party no longer represented capital as it had before and that it would have to make reforms in the interest of the workers. He believed that the SDF, like Liebknecht, was hopelessly out of date in its assessment of both Liberal and Conservative parties. In 1895 Bernstein wrote Engels,

It is really remarkable how much the local socialists foster utopianism on the one hand and live with antiquated views on the other. Last Wednesday a member of the SDF characterized the two great bourgeois parties exactly as it was customary 60 years ago: capital and land.<sup>12</sup>

In the midst of the deep antagonism between Engels and the SDF, Ernest Belfort-Bax played a complicated role. In 1875 at the age of 21, Bax travelled to Germany, where he studied music and philosophy and was attracted by the ideas of Eduard von Hartmann. In 1879 Bax read *Capital*. In 1881 he published an article on Marx which won Marx's praise, though not his complete endorsement. In the 1880's Bax was recognized in England as an authority on socialism. In 1884 he resigned from the SDF, having become a member in 1882. Engels could appreciate Bax's intellectual effort while still questioning his political judgment. In February 1886 Engels warned Laura Lafargue,

<sup>12</sup>Bernstein, *Briefwechsel mit Engels*, pp. 384, 390, and 416; the quotations are on pp. 390 and 416. *Neue Zeit*, Xa (1891-92), 677; and EB-KK October 24, 1890. For Bernstein on the Liberals, see above, 61. Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Die Herausbildung des Revisionismus von Eduard Bernstein im Lichte des Briefwechsels Bernstein-Kautsky," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus. Bericht über den wissenschaftlichen Kongreß "Die historische Leistung und aktuelle Bedeutung Eduard Bernsteins,"* Horst Heimann and Thomas Meyer, eds. (Berlin, 1978), p. 41.

In October 1894 Bebel reassured Engels that only Liebknecht still paid attention to Hyndman; *Bebels Briefwechsel mit Engels*, p. 777.



For practical agitation poor Bax is most dangerous, being utterly inexperienced; throws ideas of the study, quite raw they are, into the meeting room; has the feeling that something must be done to set the ball rolling, and does not know what.

In an April letter to Sorge, Engels described Bax as a "hunter of philosophical paradoxes," and in August 1886 Engels told Bebel that Bax had "concocted in a philosophical manner his own private socialist theory, which he holds to be the true Marxism, and caused much damage with it."<sup>13</sup>

In 1888 Bax rejoined the SDF, soon becoming one of Hyndman's co-workers and a contributor to *Justice*. Still he continued to visit Engels. He sought to reconcile the two leaders and while attempting it made life immensely more difficult for Bernstein and Kautsky. According to Bernstein, Bax allied with Louise Freyberger and her husband and then allowed them to use him against her former husband Kautsky, against Eleanor Marx, and against Bernstein, the good friend of both. Bernstein detested the alleged intrigue and resented Bax's alleged plagiarizing of various German writings, especially Kautsky's. In his memoirs Bernstein sketched what he took to be the theory of Bax: Rather than being a Marxist, Bax was in the French radical tradition.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>The correspondence of Engels to Lafargue (in English), of Engels to Sorge, and of Engels to Bebel are quoted in Bünger, pp. 101f. Engels to Bernstein on October 22, 1886, in Bernstein, *Briefwechsel mit Engels*, pp. 344f. Stanley Pierson, "Ernest Belfort Bax: 1854-1926. The Encounter of Marxism and Late Victorian Culture," *The Journal of British Studies*, XII (November 1972), 40 and 44; Hulse, pp. 86f.

<sup>14</sup>Pierson, "Ernest Belfort Bax," p. 51; Hulse, p. 86.

On conditions in Engels's household, see EB-KK October 29, 1894; KK-EB November 14, 1894; EB-KK April 20, 1895; and earlier, 6 note 9. Bax's attempt to reconcile Engels to Hyndman is suggested in *Justice*, August 24, 1895, p. 6.

Accusations about Bax's alleged plagiarism are found in EB-KK January 7, 1894; EB-KK November 11, 1894; KK-EB November 14, 1894; and KK-EB March 22, 1895. Bernstein, *Aus den Jahren meines Exils*, 2nd. ed. (Berlin 1918), pp. 216f.

## B. The *Fabian Essays*, 1889

Just as Bernstein encountered opponents in London, he also discovered allies. Soon after arriving in 1888, he began frequenting the British Museum, where he found George Bernard Shaw. That autumn Bernstein attended a series of lectures chaired by Shaw, lectures which Shaw edited and published the following year as the *Fabian Essays in Socialism*. Here lay a gold mine of arguments against opinions present in the SDF, for the Fabians had developed their theory from 1884 onward in opposition to Hyndman.<sup>1</sup> While neither approving all Fabian thought nor needing to endorse the strategy of permeation, Bernstein could still appreciate those particular ideas closest to the views of Kautsky and himself and most opposed to the SDF.

### 1. The Social Revolution

The two Marxists postulated that beneath all social and political change, including the class struggle, there occurred an economic evolution from individual labor to increasingly socialized production. Like other changes, the transition to socialism resulted from this historical process. Hence the transformation could not be accomplished through political revolution alone, no matter how violent. The Fabians could concur. Hubert Bland wrote,

All sociologists I think, all Socialists I am sure, are agreed that until the economic moment has arrived, although the hungry or the ignorant may kick up a dust in Whitechapel

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Meyer, *Bernsteins konstruktiver Sozialismus. Eduard Bernsteins Beitrag zur Theorie des Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1977), pp. 16 and 123; Helmut Hirsch, "Die bezüglich der Fabian Society transparenten Kommunikationsstrukturen als Teilaspekte der internationalen Voraussetzungen der Herausbildung des Revisionismus von Eduard Bernstein," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, p. 56. Bo Gustafsson, *Marxismus und Revisionismus. Eduard Bernsteins Kritik des Marxismus und ihre ideengeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*, Holger Heide, tr. (Frankfurt/M., 1972), pp. 143-150; Hulse, p. 115; Herbert Frei, *Fabianismus und Bernsteinscher Revisionismus* (Frankfurt/M., 1979), pp. 97-99. Bernstein, *Aus den Jahren*, pp. 242f.; also mentioned in Pierre Angel, *Eduard Bernstein et l'Evolution du Socialisme Allemand* (Paris, 1961), p. 95.

and make a bloody puddle in Trafalgar Square, the Social Revolution is impossible.

For the same reason, socialism was inevitable. Even without socialist politicians, socialist practices would be instigated, often by people antagonistic to socialism in principle.<sup>2</sup>

Kautsky and Bernstein allowed that the exact point of transition from capitalism to socialism might pass unnoticed. Since they pictured the change to rest on economic growth involving the accumulation of forces of production, they foresaw the alteration occurring gradually. Kautsky would concede during the agrarian controversy that various branches of industry and agriculture approached socialization at different speeds. Sudden imposition of the new order was implausible without a prior utopian scheme to realize. The Fabians could agree. Perhaps Shaw stated their position most eloquently:

The experienced Social Democrat converts his too ardent follower by first admitting that if the change could be made catastrophically it would be well worth making, and then proceeding to point out that as it would involve a readjustment of productive industry to meet the demand created by an entirely new distribution of purchasing power, it would also involve, in the application of labor and industrial machinery, alterations which no afternoon's work could effect. You cannot convince any man that it is impossible to tear down a government in a day; but everybody is convinced already that you cannot convert first and third class carriages into second class; rookeries and palaces into comfortable dwellings; and jewelers and dressmakers into bakers and builders, by merely singing the "Marseillaise".

More pointedly, he continued, "Demolishing a Bastille with seven prisoners in it is one thing; demolishing one with fourteen million prisoners is quite another." This emphasis on the gradual, piecemeal building up of socialism out of capitalism has been identified as the

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<sup>2</sup>*Fabian Essays in Socialism*, G. Bernard Shaw, ed. (London, 1889), pp. 30f., 62, 187, and 203. Gustafsson, pp. 150-156, also includes summary of the *Essays*. See earlier, 21-30, on economic determinism; earlier, 75, for Kautsky on the futility of legislative fiat alone.

essence of Fabianism. However, it also characterized the mature Marxist understanding of social revolution.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Scientific Analysis, not Utopian Speculation

Kautsky and Bernstein believed that an underlying economic evolution ultimately determined social and political alterations, and they charged the social-democratic theorist with elucidating the fundamental changes already occurring. They repudiated the image of the socialist as one envisioning an ideal order to be imposed suddenly on society.<sup>4</sup>

The Fabians likewise rejected such utopian speculation in favor of scholarly observation. Annie Besant maintained,

There are two ways in which a scheme for a future organization of industry may be constructed. Of these, by far the easier and less useful is the sketching of Utopia, an intellectual gymnastic in which a power of coherent and vivid imagination is the one desideratum.

And she later continued,

The second way is less attractive, less easy, but more useful. Starting from the present state of society, it seeks to discover the tendencies underlying it; to trace those tendencies to their natural outworking in institutions and so to forecast, not the far-off future, but the next social stage. It fixes its gaze on the vast changes wrought by evolution, not the petty variation made by catastrophes; on the Revolutions which transform society, not the transient riots which merely upset thrones and behead kings.

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<sup>3</sup>*Fabian Essays*, p. 183; Shaw is also quoted by Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 131. Earlier, 21f., 44f., 75, and 92f. Helmut Hirsch, *Der "Fabier" Eduard Bernstein. Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des evolutionären Sozialismus* (Bonn, 1977), p. 23; Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 21f. and 123.

<sup>4</sup>See earlier, 21f.

The two Marxists required that social democrats think carefully about their immediate demands, seeking reforms appropriate to the given stage of social development. Besant accepted the task and added that lacking a concrete plan of the future society would not pose a problem. The determined economic evolution made such a final goal useless; one needed no vision of socialism to know when to start the struggle or when to stop. She explained,

Both difficulties are disposed of by the fact that we are not "going to begin". There will never be a point at which a society crosses from Individualism to Socialism. The change is ever going forward; and our society is well on the way to Socialism. All we can do is to consciously cooperate with the forces at work, and thus render the transition more rapid than it would otherwise be.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Socialization of the Means of Production

For the Fabians the transition to socialism would heavily involve the state. It would tax what the Fabians termed "economic rent" and use the revenue to extend public enterprises. Merely to tax and regulate private property could be disastrous, they feared; the government must socialize industry. Graham Wallas insisted,

The progressive socialization of land and capital must proceed by direct transference of them to the community through taxation of rent and interest and public organization of labor with the capital so obtained: not solely by a series of restrictions upon their use in private exploitation.

Shaw, too, considered the taxation of rent a step toward socialization.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>*Fabian Essays*, pp. 150f. See also Clarke, p. 65; Wallas, p. 131; and Bland, pp. 209f. Later, 183. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 128f., distinguishes the function of social analysis for the Fabians from its use to provide evidence that the historical development would lead to socialism.

<sup>6</sup>*Fabian Essays*, pp. 47f., 140, and 179f. See also *Fabian Essays*, p. 184. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 125.

Thus the Fabians endorsed one of the two aims of German Marxism: socialization of the means of production and exchange. Moreover, in some details their vision of the transition to socialism resembled the one of Kautsky and Bernstein. For example, the Fabians believed that socialization should begin with the rings and trusts. Companies of intermediate size would die out in competition with state-owned firms; successful small-scale production could continue in private hands. During the transition phase workers would still earn wages, and income would vary with each laborer's talent and industriousness. Like Kautsky, the Fabians thought that owners should be compensated for their socialized enterprises. Various levels of government, not just the central state, might own factories and land.<sup>7</sup>

### 4. The Democratic Republic

Even if the Fabians approved one Marxist aim, socialization, surely they rejected the other one, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat? Not necessarily, if one remembers what Kautsky in the mid-1890's was coming to understand by the phrase: the rule of the working class in a democratic republic with a mixed economy.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Fabian Essays* Shaw described an earlier difficulty in deciding what institution could assume economic rent. He recalled how in the past the Whigs had criticized the national government. But now one sought democratic reforms like entrance examinations and government responsibility. Shaw explained, "Thus the old bugbear of State imbecility did not terrify the Socialist: it only made him a Democrat." Shaw proceeded,

Consequently, we have the distinctive term Social Democrat, indicating the man or woman who desires through Democracy

<sup>7</sup>*Fabian Essays*, pp. 136, 152f., and 164-166. See earlier, 44-46, 61f., 86. See also Kautsky, *Das Erfurter Programm. In seinem grundsätzlichen Teil erläutert*, 2nd. ed. (Stuttgart, 1892), pp. 158f. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 128; A. M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 109-111. In contrast, Bax criticized Sidney Webb for thinking that occasional public ownership was related to socialism; Ernest Belfort Bax, *Outlooks From the New Standpoint* (London, 1891), pp. 84f.

<sup>8</sup>See above, 31-34.



to gather the whole people into the State, so that the State may be trusted with the rent of the country, and finally with the land, the capital, and the organization of the national industry—with all the sources of production in short, which are now abandoned to the cupidity of irresponsible private individuals.

Kautsky opposed some government economic activities while condoning others. Similarly, Bland wrote,

Still it must not be forgotten that although Socialism involves State control, State control does not imply Socialism—at least in any modern meaning of the term. It is not so much to the thing the State does, as to the end for which it does it that we must look before we can decide whether it is a Socialist State or not. Socialism is the common holding of the means of production and exchange, and the holding of them for the equal benefit of all.

In the Fabian vision, even the democratic state would have limits set upon it. For example, its economic functions would need to conform to the necessary historical process, and public control of the means of production would occur at different levels of government ranging from town boards to Parliament.<sup>9</sup>

## 5. Political Revolution

The Fabians believed that achieving a democratic republic in England required only further reform within the existing constitution, something possible through the suffrage. Bland dismissed violent political revolution:

The physical force man, like the privileged Tory, has failed to take note of the flux of things, and to recognize the change brought about by the ballot. Under a lodger franchise the barricade is the last resort of a small and desperate minority, a frank confession of despair, a reduction to

<sup>9</sup>*Fabian Essays*, pp. 182 and 212; Shaw is also quoted in Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 130. See earlier, 47-50. See also Kautsky, *Erfurter Programm erläutert*, p. 130.

absurdity of the whole Socialist case. Revolutionary heroics, natural and unblameable enough in exuberant puerility, are imbecile babblement in muscular adolescence, and in manhood would be criminal folly.

Here one is reminded perhaps of Engels's warning about street fighting, of his advising English laborers to try to elect workers to Parliament, of his acknowledging that a peaceful transition to proletarian rule was possible in England, while allowing for the possibility of a counter-revolution. Kautsky and Bernstein also recognized the possibility of peaceful change in England, while remembering that Germany was far behind England on the road to becoming a democratic republic.<sup>10</sup>

## 6. Human Consciousness in History

Just because they challenged the notion that socialism could be established through utopian dreaming followed by a violent act of human will, one should not think that the Fabians relegated human consciousness to a passive role in historical development. Like Kautsky and Bernstein, they struggled to comprehend the intricate interaction of material conditions with human purposes. For Sidney Webb the human will was a product of its environment, yet could influence that environment. He argued that political change must sometimes precede social transformation and then explained,

It must by no means be supposed that these beginnings of social reorganization have been effected, or the proposals for their extension brought to the front, without the conscious efforts of individual reformers. The "Zeitgeist" is potent; but it does not pass Acts of Parliament without legislators, or erect municipal libraries without town councillors. Though our decisions are moulded by the circumstances of the time, and the environment at least roughhews our ends, shape them as we will; yet each generation decides for itself.

Like Kautsky, Sydney Olivier did not take a religious or natural law approach to ethics, but the Fabians recognized the power of morals.

<sup>10</sup>*Fabian Essays*, p. 203. See earlier, 31-34, 53f., 59-61, 114.

Olivier surmised that the socialist movement attracted people concerned about the instability of life in capitalist society--as was Kautsky.<sup>11</sup>

#### 7. The Proletariat's Struggle

The *Fabian Essays* addressed the central question of the Erfurt Program and the writings of Kautsky and Bernstein associated with it: the formation of the proletariat and its role in the coming revolution. In the *Fabian Essays* one supposed that capital development was decreasing the middle classes and reducing society to a small number of possessors facing a large number of workers. The proletariat would bring about the socialist revolution. In Olivier's opinion,

With us the class whose freedom is incessantly threatened by the operation of private capitalism is the class which by its political position holds in its hand the key to the control of industrial form: that is to say, its members can modify, as soon as they elect to, the laws of property and inheritance in this State of Britain. They can, as soon as they see clearly what is needed, supersede institutions now immoral because useless and mischievous by institutions which shall re-establish the elementary conditions of social existence and the possibility of the corresponding morality--namely, the opportunity for each individual to earn his living and the compulsion upon him to do so.<sup>12</sup>

According to the Fabians, the political conflict in Great Britain did not parallel the economic class struggle between labor and capital. Bland complained, "The truth is borne in upon us that the pace of political progress has no proper relation to the rate at which we are travelling towards Socialism in the spheres of thought and industry." Webb intended to circumvent the problem by "permeating" the Liberal Party with socialist ideas. However, Bland opposed permeation. He feared that the Liberals would simply absorb the socialists, only to expel them later. He looked forward to a true socialist party

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<sup>11</sup>*Fabian Essays*, pp. 50, 104-114, and 125-127. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 126-129; part of the quotation appears on p. 129. See earlier, 21-30 and 36.

<sup>12</sup>*Fabian Essays*, pp. 123f. and 151.

deliberately pursuing socialization of the means of production. Then the House of Commons would begin to resemble the divisions in society.<sup>13</sup>

In the *Fabian Essays* William Clarke denied that either the economic process or the political conditions had advanced far enough in Great Britain to allow the transition to socialism. However, in general the Fabians could agree that, with increasing labor influence on both major political parties, reforms could be enacted to complete the democratic system, to socialize those means of production ready for it, and to strengthen the proletariat for its future role. Again the Fabians could accept views held by Kautsky as well as by Bernstein.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>*Fabian Essays*, pp. 205 and 214-218. On Bland's differences from Webb, see Pelling, pp. 52f. and 76f., and McBriar, pp. 95-97.

<sup>14</sup>*Fabian Essays*, pp. 99. See earlier, 31f.

## C. The Fabians and German Marxism

Whence did these similarities between mature Marxism and certain aspects of Fabian thought arise? Did Bernstein simply abandon Marxism for Fabianism? He denied it. And what of Kautsky? Or did some Fabians develop Marxist ideas in the same direction as Bernstein and Kautsky? Fabians preferred to see in their efforts a repudiation of Marxism.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps there is a third possibility. The theory of socialism expressed in the *Fabian Essays* appears particularly to resemble the Marxism of Kautsky and Bernstein on those points where the Fabians rejected an approach to socialism supposedly found in the SDF: failing to study the details of economic evolution and their implications for historical change, overlooking problems of a transition to socialism, endorsing violence in social revolution even in England. The Fabians and the two Continental Marxists were dissatisfied with this kind of thinking. Earlier, Marx and Engels had criticized socialists who called for immediate proletarian revolution without regard for the necessary political and material conditions. Later, Marxists disputed the Lassalleans' "one reactionary mass" and "iron law of wages." Perhaps specific ideas in the *Fabian Essays* resembled certain ones of

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<sup>15</sup>On Bernstein's claim to continued adherence to Marxism, see Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 373. On Bernstein and Fabianism, see Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism. Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1962), pp. 106-109; and Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," in *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky, Jr., ed. (Assen, 1971), p. xxxii.

Many historians point to the similarity between Bernstein's revisionist ideas and those of the Fabians. One summary of the evidence is in Gustafsson, Chapter Four. See also Hirsch, *Der "Fabier" Eduard Bernstein*, pp. 34f.; Gustafsson, pp. 179f.; Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 18-22, 122-129, 134f., and 203 note 1; and Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, p. 108.

On British Radicalism as an alternative influence on Bernstein, see Roger Fletcher, "British Radicalism and German Revisionism: the Case of Eduard Bernstein," *The International History Review*, IV (1982), 340. See also Hulse, pp. 139f.

Marx, Engels, Kautsky, or Bernstein because both these four and the Fabians sometimes fought similar doctrines.<sup>16</sup>

However, Engels disliked the Fabians, which on the face of it would weigh against the suggestion that important parallels existed between Fabian and mature Marxist thought. Engels could oppose the Fabians' approach to socialism while still admitting that they did well on particular issues. In March 1895, for example, he wrote to Laura Lafargue, "Sidney Webb and the Fabians . . . , muffs though they be as Socialists, are really doing very good work municipally and fighting energetically and cleverly for an autonomous London." Engels resented the Fabians' upper-class orientation and their independence of the workers' movement. In early 1893 he complained to Sorge,

Here in London the Fabians are a gang of place-seekers who have enough understanding to see the inevitability of the social revolution but who cannot trust the raw proletariat alone with this giant task and accordingly have the kindness to place themselves in the lead. Fear of the revolution is their basic principle.<sup>17</sup>

In 1891 Bernstein also expressed a mixed view of the Fabians, questioning their theory and their tactics while applauding specific research. In 1892 in a letter to Bebel, Engels mentioned Bernstein's "comical respect" for the Fabians; and Bebel replied, "It is really humorous how Ede hangs on the Fabians." One should note, however,

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<sup>16</sup>Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, *passim*, understands Bernstein to have rejected a paradigm of violent social transformation implicit in the SPD (for example, the expectation of collapse and the refusal to consider necessary steps toward the new order) in favor of a paradigm like the Fabians' of a gradual construction of the socialist society. While I am indebted to Meyer's detailed study of Bernstein, I take a different general approach. For example, I focus on Bernstein's agreement with Kautsky in the mid-1890's, on the one hand, and on his opposition to Liebknecht and the SDF, on the other. On p. 123 Meyer mentions the role of the Fabians' conflict with the SDF in shaping their paradigm, and hence Bernstein's thought.

<sup>17</sup>Engels to Sorge is quoted in Bünger, pp. 138f.; and in Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, p. 107. Engels to Lafargue is quoted (in English) in Bünger, pp. 189f. note 70. Ilyichov and others, p. 437. Earlier, 104.



that Engels's comment was prompted by Kautsky's rejecting part of an article concerning the Fabians and the SDF, that Engels found Bernstein's respect for the Fabians merely comical, and that Engels expected Bernstein's regard for them to diminish if ignored. Engels did not necessarily think that Bernstein was abandoning Marxism. Then in late 1893 the Fabians underwent an apparent shift in strategy: They decided to support independent labor candidates for Parliament and appeared to break with the Liberal Party. Their assuming the new direction perhaps seemed to Bernstein to address one of Engels's objections to the Fabians--their close association with the Liberal Party and lack of ties to the working class.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps it was not a choice of "either, or." Bernstein could sincerely believe that he was a Marxist while also using certain Fabian ideas if these particular ideas were found in Marxism, too. Bernstein did not need to reject Marxism in order to use specific Fabian arguments against the SDF, because arguments like these had also been made by Kautsky, Engels, and even Marx himself. Bernstein could concur with other Fabian insights when a Marxist analysis of English conditions reached similar results. And he could use still other Fabian ideas which did not contradict Marxism.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Bebel's *Briefwechsel mit Engels*, pp. 572 and 575f. *Neue Zeit*, IXb (1891), 242f. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 11, 19, and 28. EB-KK April 30, 1891; EB-KK November 23, 1893. Norman MacKenzie and Jeanne MacKenzie, *The Fabians* (New York, 1977), pp. 202f.; Pelling, p. 147; Gay, p. 68; and McBriar, pp. 249-252. See later, 146f.

The Fabians had supported, reluctantly, the formation of the ILP in January 1893. Pelling, pp. 114, 123f., and 160; Gay, p. 107.

<sup>19</sup>Steinberg, "Herausbildung des Revisionismus," pp. 39-41, rightly points out that Bernstein's turning to the Fabians was closely interconnected with his dislike for the SDF. On the importance of Marxism as a source for Fabian thought, equal to or surpassing Mill's liberalism, see McBriar, pp. 8 and 10.

#### D. The Parliamentary Elections of 1895

Just before Engels's death in August 1895, Bernstein had become embroiled with the SDF in a bitter discussion of electoral politics in Great Britain. In mid July, *Justice* reported that some Liberals claimed to favor socialism but still campaigned against SDF candidates. The newspaper complained,

The majority of the workers who vote Liberal are not Liberals at all. They believe in Socialism, but they think it possible to get something in this direction out of the Liberals, while they regard our candidatures as hopeless. For this and other reasons, we have to go on--victory or defeat--until we have completely smashed the Liberal Party . . . .

For *Justice* there was little difference between Liberal and Tory since both favored the monopoly of the means of production.

Our object is to destroy that monopoly. Nay, more, we say that that monopoly is breaking down. We see that the forces which have developed that monopoly, and those it has engendered, are, by constantly adding to the pile of unconsumed wealth and to the means of producing wealth, as well as by the steady concentration of capital, rapidly developing a crisis in which the capitalist system will be engulfed. It is for us to help on this development by every means in our power, and as far as possible remove the obstacles which stand in its way. It is scarcely possible that the revolution will stand still while we are creating a Parliamentary majority, nor is it reasonable to suppose that the economic development will await the moment when Social-Democrats will control political power.<sup>1</sup>

Here was a program of intense if simplified class struggle, of an imminent economic collapse which was to be encouraged, and of a non-parliamentary conquest of political power. It somewhat resembled Bebel's *Kladderadatsch*, but emphasized economic necessity while

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<sup>1</sup>*Justice*, July 13, 1895, p. 4. See also *Justice*, September 7, 1895, p. 4; *Justice*, October 3, 1896, p. 1; and *Justice*, May 1, 1897, p. 2.

ignoring differences between Germany and Great Britain. It contrasted sharply with Kautsky and Bernstein's vision of socialism evolving naturally out of capitalism after the establishment of a democratic republic with a proletarian majority government.<sup>2</sup>

While an unusually severe business crisis, the Junkers, or a war against the Franco-Russian alliance might precipitate a catastrophe in Germany, Bernstein thought it silly to hope for one in England. He wrote Kautsky, "The laughable exaggerations of the Social Democratic Federation explain why many workers do not vote socialist." In an article on the fall of the Rosebery government, Bernstein sought to correct the SDF's picture of the British political situation. First, the Rosebery government represented the Liberal Party--British bourgeois democrats--and not the socialists, so he felt it was wrong to condemn the government for not fulfilling a socialist agenda. Second, Bernstein believed that with the existing electoral system, the Liberal's loss of votes to the socialists helped only the Conservatives. By attacking John Burns, the SDF had virtually guaranteed his defeat. Bernstein claimed that the sectarianism of the SDF had led to the birth of the ILP. Now, third, the ILP's policy of attacking the Liberals especially had led to a rebirth of the Labour Electoral Association of the TUC. Bernstein explained that its legislative program consisted of demands not unlike those of the socialist parties but that the Association asked laborers (when there was no worker candidate) to vote for the candidate whose program was closest to the one of the Association, which often meant a Liberal. Bernstein described the Association's recent conference as

not really an expression of reaction against socialism as much more one against the momentary tactic of the socialist parties in England or the manner in which it is presented by representatives of these. And so long as we have no large united socialist party in England which in itself offers the protection of independence from the human weakness of individual prominent personalities, the balancing weight of this organization cannot hurt.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>See above, 38-41.

<sup>3</sup>EB-KK June 30, 1895. Bernstein, "Der Sturz des Kabinetts Rosebery," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIb (1895), 431-438. Dated June 25, 1895.

In Bernstein's analysis, the British proletariat did not express its desire for socialism by supporting candidates of socialist parties because of the latter's tactlessness; instead, workers would often vote Liberal on pro-socialist grounds.

In mid-July the Liberal Party suffered a major defeat, much to the joy of the SDF. *Justice* celebrated increased SDF votes and then continued,

On the other hand we have overwhelming cause for exultation in that this election has effected the practical extinction of the Liberal Party. That organized hypocrisy, which for so long has numbed and paralyzed the revolutionary movement, has been smashed, destroyed, and pulverized. In London and the provinces, north, south, east and west; from Dan to Beersheba . . . the party of fads and frauds, of prigs and plutocrats, has been smitten hip and thigh.

Supposedly, the Liberal defeat cleared the way for the revolutionary confrontation of the two classes. "At last, at last, after years of weary working and waiting, the buffer party has been smashed, and we have got all our enemies in front."<sup>4</sup> The SDF held a formalistic view of class struggle, of society divided into two antagonistic camps with the united workers in one political movement, the united capitalists in the other.

Bernstein criticized this formalistic view. Over a period of several months his argument against the SDF consisted of three premises and a conclusion: (a) The character of class conflict might vary from country to country since politics and other cultural phenomena in the Superstructures differed for different social-economic Bases. (b) Specific political situations in Germany and Britain prevented the political contests in the two nations from mirroring the respective social-economic struggles. (c) In neither country had the historical evolution arrived at two unified groups of proletariat and capital fighting each another. (d) Hence it was foolish to apply the German political model even to politics in Britain, much less to economic or social development. Bernstein could see his attack on the SDF's schema (Schablone) as Marxist; he was merely applying

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<sup>4</sup>*Justice*, July 20, 1895, p. 1.

Engels's understanding of the relationship between Basis and Superstructure.<sup>5</sup>

Writing in mid-July 1895, before all the election returns were in, Bernstein observed that British workers had appeared to vote against their own interests, even helping elect candidates opposed to extension of the franchise or the factory laws. Such behavior must seem strange to many Continental social democrats. Bernstein remarked,

We see in the industrial proletariat the spiritual carrier of social progress, the revolutionary class by occupation and nature; and in the country where this class is the strongest and most developed, it appears to prove itself not a revolutionary, rather a conservative if not even a reactionary force. Is our theory false?<sup>6</sup>

Not necessarily, as Bernstein would go on to explain. When conditions varied greatly from country to country, one theory need not reach identical results.

Bernstein argued that in Germany the proletariat still confronted a semi-feudal, bureaucratic police state obeyed by a bourgeoisie which sought compensation in profits for its lack of political influence. Social democrats had to fight for liberal-democratic reforms. Bernstein wrote,

We overcame most of the childhood illnesses very early and became a great political party almost before the historical preconditions for a strong independent action by the proletariat were completely fulfilled. It shall not be discussed here how this is reflected in the relationship that often exists between our talk and our actions, but it should be remembered that we often enough, and correctly, carry out political tasks which should basically be matters for bourgeois

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<sup>5</sup>See earlier, 22-26.

<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, "Die Arbeiter und der Wahlkampf in England," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIb (1895), 522f. Dated July 15, 1895.

parties. We realize that with the power we took from them we also received their duties in part.<sup>7</sup>

A few weeks later this insight was reflected in Bernstein's comment to Kautsky that at present the SPD could be only a radical reform party in practice and that speeches calling for government economic aid to the peasants were incommensurate with the party's situation.<sup>8</sup> An apparent contradiction between the long-term goal of socialism and the immediate demand for bourgeois reforms was unavoidable in Germany without a democratic republic.

Bernstein had become convinced that in the struggle for liberalism and democracy in Germany important economic conflicts among the laborers, within the bourgeoisie, and between the bourgeoisie and Junkers were artificially covered over. The appearance of a two-class polarization arose from Germany's reactionary political constitution, not from an advanced stage of social-economic development. Thus Germany's rigid form of political struggle did not provide an adequate model of class conflict—if not even for Germany, so much less so for Great Britain. Bernstein wrote,

Now if this formalistic understanding leads even in Germany to very slanted judgments of things, which would necessarily become disastrous if for the most part the healthy instinct of the party did not find the right way when it comes to action, it becomes absolutely untenable in countries where the preconditions for a hothouse development of things are absent.

We perceive the class struggle as occurring continuously in the same direction among groups which more or less correspond to each other economically and politically; accordingly, the political and economic class struggles correspond. Things appear differently to the English worker. Groups which still play a fairly important role in Germany do not exist for him; those which do exist stand to each other and to him politically in changing party alignments. The economic conflicts are reflected politically in a much weaker

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<sup>7</sup>Bernstein, "Die Arbeiter und der Wahlkampf in England," p. 524.

<sup>8</sup>See earlier, 105f. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 30.



form, a much more obscured form than in Germany; the economic struggle and the political struggle appear sometimes to fit together as little as family conflicts and political party attachments.<sup>9</sup>

In an analysis like Bernstein's, the advanced stage of social-economic development in Great Britain did not manifest itself in a two-party political conflict because of the workers' immaturity and because of inadequate leadership among socialists. In Germany, because of the reactionary nature of the Junker monarchy, the comparatively earlier stage of development did not produce a strong group of progressive political parties compromising with one another and seeking liberal-democratic reforms. In both countries local, particular, political-constitutional aspects of the Superstructure modified the class struggle in the social-economic Basis. From Bernstein's perspective, only a fool would use the German model to interpret British politics—to assume that in Great Britain a specifically social-democratic party could represent a united proletariat as the SPD appeared to do in Germany, to argue that the British Liberal Party was as conservative as the liberal parties in Germany, or to believe that the Liberal Party represented the interests of capital as did its German counterparts. Yet, to Bernstein, such foolishness was what the SDF was doing. Moreover, the German model failed even for Germany to the extent it retained Lassalleian elements like "one reactionary mass." A mature Marxist analysis advised a policy like the SPD leaders' actual practice of cooperation.

In his mid-July article Bernstein commented that often British workers voted for their own immediate economic interests, which made the political situation even more complicated. In the absence of a political pressure artificially unifying the movement, laborers in various industries and localities carried on the class struggle in varying ways, sometimes even against other workers' organizations, he observed. There was no simple class struggle of proletariat against capital on the national level.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Bernstein, "Die Arbeiter und der Wahlkampf in England," p. 524. Compare Kautsky's comments on compromise in theory and in practice, above, 51f.

<sup>10</sup>Bernstein, "Die Arbeiter und der Wahlkampf in England," pp. 525-527.

In late July Bernstein criticized the ILP. It would have been all right for the party to campaign to win, he agreed. But instead, it targeted the Liberals, immensely benefiting the Conservatives while gaining nothing itself. Following the slogan of "smash the Liberals," in districts without an independent labor candidate, socialists even voted for the Tory. Bernstein believed that the policy was not necessary and that with modest cooperation the ILP could have secured a number of seats. He judged that the ILP tactic helped give the Tories more power than they had enjoyed that century. Besides unjustifiably accusing the Liberals of being the party of wealth, the socialist candidates even adopted Conservative arguments. Bernstein concluded,

When the psychologically understandable but factually little justified joy in the socialist camp over the damage caused the Liberals is past, it is hoped that one will there too move on to carrying out a revision of one's own policy.<sup>11</sup>

When in late July the editors of *Justice* learned that a German socialist writer had in *Vorwärts* responded differently to the elections, they assumed that it was a foreigner unfamiliar with their situation in Great Britain. The Liberal Party there was unlike liberal parties on the Continent, they claimed, in that it deceitfully promised socialism in order to thwart the social-democratic movement. The Liberals would have succeeded still better except for the policy of attacking them.<sup>12</sup>

Bernstein answered that he knew the English situation and that he asked what each party would do to strengthen the proletariat. "I try to judge parties after their actual position and main composition and their measures according to their actual value for the final emancipation of the workers," he said. The Liberals depended on the labor vote more than did the Conservatives. According to Bernstein, the SDF had misjudged the Tories, too. They were ever more the party of reaction, representing nine tenths of the nation's wealth. Bernstein expected that they would limit the London County Council, strengthen the private

<sup>11</sup>Bernstein, "Die Arbeiter und der Wahlkampf in England," pp. 565-572. Dated July 22, 1895. The German term "Revision" might here be translated by "review," "reconsideration," or even "reflection upon."

<sup>12</sup>*Justice*, July 27, 1895, p. 1. On the SDF's opposition to cooperation with other parties, see Pelling, p. 171.

schools, and oppose worker influence. Moreover, helping defeat the Liberals did not profit the socialists. Bernstein echoed Engels, "On the whole I think the elections have shown that the Socialists have a better chance where they have not acted before as the door-Opener to the Conservatives." Here Bernstein was not arguing in favor of the Liberal Party. Rather, he was questioning a tactic of assisting the Tories, a policy which he thought hurt the socialist movement in the workers' eyes. In a passage recalling Kautsky's warnings against utopian speculation replacing concrete demands, Bernstein perhaps implied that the socialist parties had focused too much on future goals to the neglect of present interests. *Justice* retorted,

We regret that Bernstein does not see that the view he takes of our action is precisely that taken by the most dangerous and insidious of our enemies here. It is not, as he seems to suppose, a question of the Liberals in office or out of office, but of so crippling their party as to prevent them from any further gulling the workers. . . . Surely when all English Socialists are entirely agreed upon a given policy it is rather surprising to experience adverse criticism from our German comrades, especially when that policy is bitterly resented by the parties who are ever ready to applaud any reverse our comrades any way suffer.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, *Justice* identified "English Socialists" with socialist voters, not with socialist-minded trade unionists who voted for the Liberals.

In the following months Bernstein and the SDF published additional evidence to uphold their respective interpretations of British politics. To *Justice*, the Cardiff TUC in late August confirmed that the trade unions had turned against socialism. *Justice* complained that during the elections SDF candidates had stood for the goals of the unions, including nationalization of the means of production, that many SDF candidates had sided with the trade unions, but that union members still voted Liberal. Then, via the TUC's Parliamentary Committee, the old unions pushed through a policy of proportional representation, thus greatly increasing their influence in TUC decisions;

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<sup>13</sup>*Justice*, August 10, 1895, pp. 5 and 1. Bernstein's remarks in *Justice* were in English. Letters to the editor of *Justice* criticizing Bernstein are found in *Justice*, August 17, 1895, p. 6. For Kautsky's views on utopian speculation, see above, 21.

a policy of ending representation from local trades councils; and a policy of requiring delegates to be actively engaged in their trade, thus excluding Tom Mann, John Burns, and James Keir Hardie. *Justice* criticized the latter policy and also the motion to rescind previous resolutions in favor of nationalization.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, Bernstein described the TUC at Cardiff as understandable and to social democrats acceptable. Some opposition to the legal eight-hour work day surfaced, because the resolution in question did not include a clause allowing for voluntary exemption of certain trades; but the TUC showed solid progress on child labor, Bernstein decided. He argued that limiting delegates to only those practicing their trade made sense in a country which seemed to have so many political adventurers. Bernstein recognized that proportional representation bestowed great power on the executives of the largest unions, but to him the nature of the congresses justified it. He explained,

But at them it is mainly a matter of questions of direct execution, of resolutions for which the trade unions must be willing and ready to commit their entire power. And though the crushing of the smaller and more middle-sized by the large organizations is theoretically possible, it is little to be feared in practice, other than as a countermeasure against the attempt to impose on the large organizations a policy of which they do not want to hear.

Where the SDF judged the TUC on its acceptance of a specific ideal, comprehensive nationalization of the means of production, here Bernstein asked what organization of the TUC would best strengthen the union movement and the working class. Bernstein reported that to the ILP and SDF the proportional representation and the other changes appeared anti-socialist, but he found this viewpoint exaggerated. He maintained,

What the representatives of the large trade unions are turning against is not socialism as theory or world view but

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<sup>14</sup>*Justice*, July 27, 1895, p. 1; *Justice*, August 31, 1895, p. 1. See also *Justice*, September 7, 1895, pp. 1 and 4f.; September 14, p. 5; and September 21, p. 4. On pp. 192f. Pelling describes the new regulations.

rather socialism as they meet it in practice, represented by the socialist party or party groups as a political factor.

Significantly, Bernstein observed, the trade union leaders most favoring the new practice were opponents of the ILP, often from areas where the ILP's role in the recent parliamentary elections had been bitterly resented. Bernstein believed that the new policy enjoyed wide support. He told Kautsky on September 4, 1895,

It is the reaction of the workers' movement against socialist adventurism. If the Parl. Committee had not imposed the new statutes . . . on the congress, the majority for them would probably have been even greater.

In his article Bernstein questioned the ILP:

It cannot be denied that the unions as a whole are moving forward. When they suddenly stop and give a vote of no confidence to a party which specifically calls itself the workers' party [the ILP], it is still worth the trouble to investigate if the mistake does not lie to a good extent on the side of the latter.<sup>15</sup>

In unsigned reports to *Vorwärts* in November, Bernstein attempted to provide further evidence of how little the economic class struggle in Great Britain corresponded to the political one in Germany. In municipal elections ILP attacks on the Liberals helped Conservatives win, while both Liberal and Tory candidates adopted the socialists' proposals. Hence, for Bernstein, progress toward socialism was not reflected in the number of votes for a particular party. On November 10 Bernstein reported how far even a Conservative minister was willing to cooperate with labor. A delegation had visited R. W. Hanbury, Secretary of the Treasury, to discuss a resolution that the government award contracts only to firms with suitable wages, working conditions, hours, etc. According to Bernstein, the Treasury Secretary fully approved the practice, as stated in the 1891 resolution; he asked the unions to report violations of the resolution; and he promised to act in

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<sup>15</sup>Bernstein, "Der Trade Unions-Kongreß von Cardiff und seine Bedeutung," *Neue Zeit*, XIIIb (1895), 783-791. EB-KK September 4, 1895.

the House of Commons against such infractions. The Secretary declared that good wages and working conditions should be achieved through well organized trade unions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>*Vorwärts*, November 13, 1895, p. 1; *Vorwärts*, November 19, 1895, p. 1.



## E. Fabian Arguments Against the SDF

During a bleak period in the spring of 1895, Bernstein had confessed to Kautsky, "Our movement is going forward, but in its advance it develops aspects which really make one very pessimistic. Sometimes my pessimism goes so far, I begin to doubt myself." He also described his disappointment with the SDF.

. . . in the winter I participated in a supper club of the big wigs in the SDF, etc. But my enthusiasm for them . . . did not increase. The vanity of the leaders is limitless, and of the others some are sectarians and others place-hunters. . . . The longer I am here the more I understand the Fabian Society and the old trade unions. With all their mistakes they are still to be forgiven on many issues.<sup>1</sup>

It is hardly surprising that after his altercation with the SDF over the election tactics of the ILP, Bernstein would seek to inform his German readers about the Fabians and their view of British politics.

## 1. The Speeches by Hyndman and Shaw

In early October 1895 Bernstein juxtaposed the SDF's response to the July elections with that of Shaw. Bernstein recalled how British socialists had replied harshly when he had questioned their rejoicing in the Parliamentary election returns. Still, Bernstein believed that their votes were in proportion neither to their efforts nor to the popularity of socialist ideas. They had not gained the former Liberal voters.

Thus at least the question should have been allowed, whether the tactic and program of the social democrats could not be improved after all.

However, it is understandable that one does not happily admit something like this on the morning after the battle.

In any event, Bernstein reported that Hyndman was expected soon to announce a campaign for nationalization of the railroads and for public

<sup>1</sup>EB-KK April 13, 1895. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 29, also refers to the letter. Compare Bernstein's confession to the remark by Auer quoted earlier, 2.

maintenance of school children. In this Bernstein perceived a shift in tactic. He explained,

The policy of the Federation was until now in essence strongly impossiblistic. Everything which did not lead to the great revolution expected sooner or later, but probably sooner, was handled only with gloves on, if I may so express myself. This was one of the major reasons why the Federation, despite the unceasing propaganda carried out with a zeal worthy of wonder, was unable to win a secure hold on the great mass of the population; why its work always seeped through its fingers again, it lost highly qualified people to other organizations, and in July it received barely a tenth of the independent socialist vote. As near or as far as the great, all-changing revolution may be, the Englishman wants to see practical measures, wants to know the how and where, wants to be convinced of the reality of the measures promised him or recommended to him before he joins a movement or gives it his vote. Thus in that the Federation is taking one or more concrete questions as special objects of agitation, it moves to an area much more sympathetic and understandable to the British national spirit, and it can count with reasonable likelihood on success, if it handles the matter correctly. I do not need to add that such agitation neither excludes continuing to advocate the general principles of socialism nor needs even temporarily impair it.<sup>2</sup>

On the contrary. According to the Marxism of Kautsky and Bernstein, conditions in England called for precisely such concrete reforms. There need be no Kladderadatsch because the country had already had its bourgeois revolution; the way stood open for the proletariat's peaceful conquest of political power and for a gradual social revolution. In such circumstances a strategy of focusing on the collapse was conservative, to this way of thinking, for it impeded measures to complete the democratic republic, to strengthen the workers for rule, and to further the transition from individual to collective production. Now it appeared that the SDF would seriously

<sup>2</sup>Bernstein, "Englische Partei-Entwicklungen," *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 77-80. Dated October 6, 1895. That the SDF had long endorsed "social palliatives" is mentioned by Collins, p. 57.

advocate at least some reforms, without abandoning the imminent catastrophe. The question remained, however, whether its proposals were appropriate.

Next Bernstein traced Shaw's career as music critic and dramatist and admitted that in his work satire had a major role.

However, it must be added that despite a tendency to play with paradoxes, Mr. Shaw takes socialism very seriously and conscientiously; his mistake lies more in being too pessimistic than in, otherwise more common with literary figures, inclining to adventurism. Always available where it is a matter of strengthening socialism, of serious action, in the last elections he spoke, for example, in Battersea for John Burns as well as in West Ham for the latter's socialist opposite, Keir Hardie. He belonged to the first members of the Social Democratic Federation; he was then one of the first to realize that its doctrinaire form of agitation rather held the movement back than advanced it; and with others who thought the same he founded the Fabian Society, whose title already shows that it stands under the sign of opportunism. It is the ambition of the Fabians to be the Jesuits of the socialist movement; and it cannot be denied that in this capacity they have achieved a certain success.

As examples, Bernstein mentioned their influence on the London County Council and their helping compose the Newcastle program.

Their slogan that one must try to permeate the Liberal Party with socialism . . . has brought them much criticism; and the way the slogan was followed made the Society suspect as being only a kind of agent for the Liberals. But this opinion has proven itself totally unfounded, while on the other hand the hope which the Fabians placed in their policy of "permeation" likewise emerged as exaggerated.

Bernstein emphasized the Fabians' break with the Liberal Party in 1893; and he quoted extensively from the November 1893 article by Webb and Shaw, "To Your Tents, O Israel," calling for independent

labor representatives in Parliament irrespective of the fate of the Liberals.<sup>3</sup>

Bernstein related that in a recent speech Shaw had rejected the contention that Liberal candidates had faced defeat because the Rosebery government had done too much for social reform. Still, according to Shaw, collectivism was a position which had to be taken carefully; throwing around phrases was insufficient; despite its rhetoric, the ILP had failed to win votes in proportion to the popularity of collectivism. Bernstein quoted Shaw, "Opinions are sufficient for the agitator, but they are inadequate for the administrator and legislator." Shaw judged the Liberal Party as little likely to prepare specific proposals as were the trade unions and the socialists, the socialists being fifty years out of date in their political understanding. For this predicament Shaw proclaimed,

"I raise the call for a realistic program of specific reform proposals based on appropriate study. I no longer turn to the working class, in whose political initiative I have lost faith. I turn to the coming generation of people's representatives, no matter of which party or class."<sup>4</sup>

Bernstein contradicted Shaw's conclusion. Socialism need not be attached to a particular political party in Great Britain, but it did rest with the proletariat. Bernstein declared, "No matter how slow the pace of the movement, no matter how many disappointments it has already brought, there is still no reason to despair about this class." No doubt, Bernstein hoped that German social democrats would listen to Shaw's opinion of the ILP and SDF. Bernstein wrote,

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<sup>3</sup>Bernstein, "Englische Partei-Entwicklungen," pp. 80f. Above, 132. Bernstein's commentary on Shaw is analyzed in Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 80 and 139f.

<sup>4</sup>Bernstein, "Englische Partei-Entwicklungen," pp. 81-84. Shaw's speech was to a public meeting of the Fabian Society held at Essex Hall in London on October 4, 1895. The address is summarized in *Fabian Society Papers*, C 38, *Fabian Society Minutes of Meetings* 24 April 1891 to 24 January 1896, entry for October 4, 1895. The text of the speech was to appear in the *Daily Chronicle*, October 5, 1895.

... if it is right what Shaw accuses the fighting socialists of, that in their political science they are fifty years behind, this alone explains why many workers, although they have accepted socialist teachings up to a certain point, still hesitate to throw themselves into the arms of the socialist parties.

Engels had already reached this assessment, Bernstein revealed.

Not long ago Friedrich Engels said the same thing as Shaw, only much more concisely, when he declared of the Social Democratic Federation that it turned the Marxist teachings into a sectarian dogma; and he too was of the opinion that the Independent Labour Party did not pay enough attention to the fact that to become the party of the workers it must first win their complete political trust. But he would have criticized Shaw's conclusion even more sharply. Indeed, there possiblism turns again into the highest impossiblism. The coming generation of parliamentarians, to whom Shaw appeals, would be unable to achieve anything without the assisting support of the working class.<sup>5</sup>

For Bernstein, Shaw was correct when he repeated Engels's criticism of the British socialist parties. Bernstein opposed Shaw, however, when he turned against faith like Engels's in the proletariat as history's revolutionary force.

## 2. The Afterword to the Webbs

In October 1895 Bernstein also published an Afterword to his wife's German translation of *The History of Trade Unionism* by Sidney and Beatrice Webb. He described the Webbs as very empirical, seeking to present the facts of British labor history as they found them.

<sup>5</sup>Bernstein, "Englische Partei-Entwicklungen," pp. 84f. Bernstein's paraphrase of Engels on the SDF might be compared with Engels's 1892 statement to Kautsky, quoted earlier, 117; or with Schönlanck's Breslau reference to Engels, earlier, 100f. On Bernstein's continuing to see the SPD as a proletarian party, see Detlef Lehnert, "Die Rezeption Bernsteins in der 'linken' Kritik," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, p. 373, and Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 303.

However, far from contradicting Marxism, to him they verified its central tenet—that basic economic forces shaped social and political movements. Bernstein stated,

For us then, who as adherents to the materialist conception of history believe to possess in it and in the teaching about class struggle contained in it the continuing economic thread required for the systematic exploration and treatment of these kinds of phenomena, it is accordingly all the more interesting to be able to establish that the authors by and large in their own way have provided an unintended test of the doctrine. Indeed, what is the until now established total outcome of their research? The fact that just as the rise of the trade unions is the result of specific economic developments, so also later their forms, their policies, and their ideology are in the last instance always again determined by the special relationships in the affected industries, their nature and level of development.

By way of comparison, Bernstein mentioned how several years earlier in his article on the "iron law of wages" he had reasoned that trade unions would be more powerful in those industries where entry into the work force was limited by strength or skill or where the workers had aid from factory legislation. He was convinced that the Webbs now confirmed this conclusion.<sup>6</sup>

Bernstein opposed an interpretation of class struggle which found in German politics a model not merely for British political development but even for economic and social evolution. In his opinion, the Webbs' ideas corrected such a mistake. Bernstein wrote,

Today's theory of class struggle, as it is so often falsely understood, thus obtains a crucial rectification. Not only malicious adversaries but also those who follow it faithfully

<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, "Nachwort" to Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Die Geschichte des Britischen Trade Unionismus*, R. Bernstein, tr. (Stuttgart, 1895), pp. 445-447. Compare Bernstein, *Briefwechsel mit Engels*, p. 418; also in Hirsch, *Der "Fabier" Eduard Bernstein*, pp. 19f. Summary and analysis of the "Nachwort" are found in Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 137-139; see also Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, pp. 108f. On the "iron law of wages," see earlier, 18. And compare earlier, 22.



often connect it to the idea of a thoroughly steady and simultaneous change in industrial relations. A law about a tendency is always taken as if it declared to be completed fact that which it merely describes as the goal of a recognized direction of movement. We are in fact still far from that similarity of developmental stages; and even if it were reached, there would remain great differences in the nature of individual branches of industry, which to ignore would be a grave mistake with tragic consequences.<sup>7</sup>

Marx had identified the tendency of capitalist society to divide into two homogeneous and hostile classes--proletariat and bourgeoisie. In Bernstein's thinking, the reactionary political situation in Germany, the Reichstag vote, and the continued popularity of Lassalleian slogans led many to assume that this social-economic tendency was virtually fulfilled. He found the assumption a mistake even for Germany. It was certainly wrong to conclude from the polarized nature of German politics that there remained only two homogeneous economic classes in Great Britain. Variations among industries produced conflicting interest groups within the proletariat and among the bourgeois. Kautsky had also warned against turning tendencies into completed facts--for example, his views on worker impoverishment and on the demise of small-scale production.<sup>8</sup>

In his Afterword Bernstein implied that the true Marxist was not the one uncritically using the German political struggle for a schema but rather the one studying trade union and political events to see exactly how they related to the underlying economic conditions. He said that Marx's theory

truly provides us in its central teaching about class struggle with the key to understanding social phenomena; but it does not remove our responsibility to examine things in their special character and connections and in their multiple relationships. And this is true everywhere, even in the seemingly uncomplicated area of trade unions. Here too we have to be careful not to fool ourselves, that for instance we

<sup>7</sup>Bernstein, "Nachwort," p. 446.

<sup>8</sup>On Kautsky see earlier, 35-37 and 92f. Compare Bernstein's views, earlier, 137f.

have said all that is necessary when we throw in the word "class struggle." . . . Used as a schema, the best theory can lead to obscuring reality as easily as the worst theory or the lack of any guiding criteria.<sup>9</sup>

Bernstein's observation may bring to mind Marx's 1872 speech in Amsterdam: "We know that one must recognize the institutions, morals, and traditions of various countries." Or one might consider Engels's warning to Mehring about the complexity confronted when seeking to relate political and other phenomena to underlying economic facts. In a later polemic with an SDF member, Kautsky would return to this issue. For Kautsky and Bernstein, Marxism constituted a method of analysis--not a model.<sup>10</sup>

In his Afterword, Bernstein sought to correct what he perceived to be misconceptions of the trade-union movement. He conceded that the interplay of interest groups sometimes hid basic class struggles. But class conflict continued nonetheless, and the unions formed an integral part of it. Bernstein wrote,

Of course there is no doubt that the trade unions are to a large degree the product and organ of the class struggle, even when they act peacefully and in essence their members are envisioning peaceful purposes.

The facts revealed by the Webbs showed, according to Bernstein, that the truth lay between the extremes of claiming that trade unions alone could emancipate the workers or denying that the unions accomplished any good at all. Bernstein admitted that the trade unions were composed largely of a labor aristocracy, but he ascribed this characteristic to the entire workers' movement including the socialist parties. To him, the Webbs' findings refuted the opinion that the more an economy advanced, the less opportunity there was for unions. Perhaps most significantly, Bernstein suggested that the unions would

<sup>9</sup>Bernstein, "Nachwort," pp. 444-446.

<sup>10</sup>*Marx-Engels Werke*, XVIII, 160. Earlier, 25. Later, 238-258. In the letter EB-KK September 16, 1895, Bernstein complained of Franz Mehring's simplistic use of "class struggle" and also mentioned that he was just finishing the Afterword. See later, 156. The letter is also cited by Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 31.

play an important role not only in preparing the proletariat for political rule but also in expediting the economic transition to socialism:

One does not need to be a Manchesterite or anarchist or one opposed to appealing to or using the state in order to find it undesirable that the workers grow used to expecting all help and improvement from the state, "from above." Whoever has not surrendered to faith in a future miracle, in the impression that in each moment of need effective organic institutions can be created out of thin air, will welcome trade unions not only as a training ground for far-reaching democratic self-government but also as an important lever for the economic changes social democracy desires to achieve. The thesis that the emancipation of the working class must be its own achievement has deeper significance than merely the workers seizing the power of the state.<sup>11</sup>

Here Bernstein tacitly questioned both the SDF's Lassallean and non-Marxist dislike for trade unions in capitalist society and also its presumed assumption that socialism would be enacted overnight. Exclusive reliance on the state was dangerous, to Bernstein, for even the most powerful worker government would require assistance from other political, social, and economic institutions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Bernstein, "Nachwort," pp. 445 and 447-450. The quotation is also in Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 138. For further reference to the Webbs' work on the trade unions, see EB-KK November 8, 1896. See also Hirsch, "Bezüglich der Fabian Society," pp. 48-50.

<sup>12</sup>It was Lassalle who disapproved of trade unions; Marx favored them. Gay, 133. Concerning unions the SDF followed Lassalle, not Marx. For Hyndman's attitude toward the trade unions and the state, see earlier, 113. See Collins, pp. 43f.; and Pierson, *British Socialists*, p. 28.

If one anticipated a jump from capitalism to socialism, then one need not consider the problems of a transitional phase perhaps lasting decades—a time during which a proletarian government might require cooperation from various labor organizations in dealing with privately-owned capitalist firms. It was upon this period of time, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, that Kautsky and Bernstein were both coming to focus.

Bernstein remarked that the Webbs had failed to assess Marx correctly. Bernstein speculated that in their criticism of another socialist, they may have been influenced by their struggle against a sectarian utopianism. Then Bernstein concluded the Afterword by repeating his critique of the SDF's sentiments about the Cardiff TUC. It was more against the tactic of certain socialist parties than against socialism itself that the unions had reacted. He wrote,

No matter how far-reaching the goals envisioned by its enthusiastic representatives, once the time to act arrives, the given conditions will determine the given means. Where the possibility arises to fight for step-by-step improvements, the trade unions will turn to this; and the better they are organized, the less they will feel inclined to jeopardize their organization in risky undertakings. In this sense it is correct to see in the strengthening of the unions a diversion from revolutionary undertakings. But if one sets aside the policeman's view of revolution, one with "pitchforks," it is a great error to see in the movement begun in 1889 a weakening of the revolutionary movement of the working class. It turns out that the diversion into "constitutional channels" has strengthened the movement decisively. The road to the emancipation of the working class is a long and winding one. The crucial point is not how each step forward is taken, but that it is taken.<sup>13</sup>

Thus Bernstein rejected the SDF's "Pitchfork Revolution." While many in the SPD expected a Kladderadatsch in Germany, leaders did not insist that it must occur or be violent. Marx had denied that violent proletarian revolution was required in Great Britain (though he feared a counterrevolution). For England, Bernstein could believe that the "constitutional channels" were the more Marxist tactic. There the ongoing, piecemeal historical evolution, in which the unions and their demands provided a motive force, was more important than a utopian model about impoverishment, upheaval, and the leap into socialism. Bernstein increasingly emphasized the necessary historical "movement" toward socialism as the more certain and possibly shorter route,

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<sup>13</sup>Bernstein, "Nachwort," pp. 454f.; the passage is quoted in part by Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 139. Earlier, 141f.

preferable in any case to speculating on some catastrophe preceding a hypothetical "final goal."<sup>14</sup>

### 3. On Cooperatives in Germany

In an essay on cooperatives, Bernstein addressed issues from his article on Shaw and the Afterword to the Webbs—the need for concrete and appropriate reforms to strengthen the proletariat for future rule, class conflict often being peaceful, the danger in slogans devoid of meaning, the incongruity of political and economic struggles. Now, however, Bernstein applied his observations to Germany.

Bernstein noted the difficulty of relating final goals to immediate reforms for the period before proletarian rule. Bernstein granted,

It is difficult to think up an economic measure which can be carried out on the basis of bourgeois society that does not appear contradictory when measured against the goals and basic principles of social democracy.

To him, the principle of class struggle did not overcome the problem.<sup>15</sup>

Bernstein believed that the advancement of proletarian emancipation might involve acts which temporarily weakened the class struggle and that the class struggle could occur in different forms. The implication was that the consumer cooperative could be one of them.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>For views of Marx and Engels on revolution in Britain, see earlier, 59 and 114.

<sup>15</sup>Bernstein, "Ein Genossenschaftsprojekt," *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 229.

One might compare this remark with Bernstein's comment in his earlier article on the British Parliamentary elections that the SPD in Germany needed to carry out liberal-democratic reforms before its socialist goals could be realized, with Bernstein's letter to Kautsky commenting on the radical language of the "agrarians" at Breslau, and with Kautsky's own theory about the origins of state socialism. See earlier, 104-106 and 136f.

<sup>16</sup>Bernstein, "Ein Genossenschaftsprojekt," p. 229. On Bernstein and mild forms of class struggle, see Gay, pp. 207f.

Bernstein favored the cooperative movement in Great Britain, though not in Germany where he found political and economic preconditions absent. Bernstein pointed out that Marx had at least partially endorsed cooperatives free of state or bourgeois influence—while the Lassallians had opposed consumer cooperatives, on the one hand, and associated production cooperatives with state support, on the other. By mentioning that the SDF had opposed cooperatives, Bernstein implicitly categorized it as Lassalleian and not Marxist.<sup>17</sup>

Bernstein criticized using the Lassalleian slogan of an "iron law of wages" to reject proletarian cooperatives. In general, in this article Bernstein warned against an over-reliance on Lassalleian phrases. For example, Bernstein suggested that the Lassalleans' "iron law" and their associating cooperatives with state help had confused the cooperative issue. These were past mistakes which German social democracy had overcome.<sup>18</sup>

Though urging caution in founding cooperatives in Germany, Bernstein confessed that he prized proletarian economic action in addition to political action. A one-sided emphasis on state assistance was another mistake the SPD had overcome, he thought. While recognizing the need to conquer political power, social democrats would not want to encourage a generation of workers to expect everything from the state.<sup>19</sup>

Even while discussing the workers' movement in Germany, Bernstein considered the question of what conditions would be required for the successful transition from capitalism to socialism. He feared that dependence on the state could endanger proletarian rule. So, just after Hyndman's call for public maintenance of school children, Bernstein was questioning the policy of encouraging workers to turn to

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<sup>17</sup>Bernstein, "Ein Genossenschaftsprojekt," pp. 229f.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 230f. Compare Bernstein to Luise Kautsky, ca. October 15, 1895, DV 341, Kautsky Papers, IISH.

<sup>19</sup>Bernstein, "Ein Genossenschaftsprojekt," pp. 234-236. Here Bernstein did not explain *why* he was troubled that workers might grow too dependent on the state. In mid-1896 Bernstein connected the concern to his fear that under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat the workers might demand too much too soon from the state. See later, 185f. and 209f.; and earlier, 151f. See also Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 326f.



the government. Along with the trade unions, Bernstein now saw an alternative in the cooperatives.<sup>20</sup>

A month earlier, in a letter to Kautsky on September 16, 1895, Bernstein had criticized both Mehring and Liebknecht for using an overly formalistic model of class struggle. Bernstein was disappointed by Mehring's belittling of the bourgeoisie and by his uncritical praise of the proletariat. "When I read our press, it often appears to me as if our teaching about class struggle stands in danger of changing from a clarifying theory into an oversimplifying dogma," Bernstein warned. He said that one could expect more of Mehring than of the active editor of a social-democratic newspaper (that is, Liebknecht). Falling into a schema (Schablone) hurt Mehring's essays. Bernstein deliberated, "Perhaps I shall next send you an article about the class struggle in which I shall unload many things in this respect which I have long had on my chest." He would not mention Mehring by name, however.<sup>21</sup>

The proposed article may have been Bernstein's "English Party Developments" or his "A Cooperative Project." He may have referred to concerns expressed in his Afterword to the Webbs' study of British trade unionism. The three texts recommended both avoiding dogma and slogans to study actual conditions and also seeking appropriate actions to prepare the proletariat for future rule. In any case, Bernstein felt that Mehring like Liebknecht misrepresented the doctrine of class struggle in a fashion similar to the SDF.

#### 4. The Translation of MacDonald

In avoiding slogans to study the actual character of the British class struggle and in identifying demands appropriate to a given stage of development, Bernstein found the Fabians closer to Marxism than was the SDF. So after hearing a speech by James Ramsay MacDonald at a private meeting of the Fabian Society on October 25, 1895, Bernstein asked Kautsky to publish it. In Bernstein's opinion,

The Fabians have a good side: They do not get hung up on phrases but rather go to the bottom of the matter. Thus they approach much closer to the Marxist praxis . . . much closer than nearly all the local "Marxists," from the idiot

<sup>20</sup>Earlier, 144f.

<sup>21</sup>EB-KK September 16, 1895.

Hyndman to the philosopher Bax and the poet Edward [Aveling].

Whenever Hyndman proposed something practical, it was something which the Radicals, even some Conservatives, wanted but which the workers did not, Bernstein claimed.

And he of all people is taken to be the authority in matters of Marxism. No wonder the latter is unpopular among solid people. I shall now try to pave the way for a better understanding of what Marx taught.<sup>22</sup>

To Bernstein, the MacDonald speech illustrated the imperative to recognize that not only conditions but also ways of conceptualizing varied between countries. When detailed questions were involved, a solid analysis of political or social measures for one nation might contradict views popular elsewhere. Bernstein wrote,

All too often we are inclined to take such differences from our own criteria of judgment as proof of lower intelligence, when in fact in many cases they are the necessary product of the other conditions faced by the person making the judgment. In order to understand tactics differing from ours and belonging to socialists in another country, we must know personally the country's institutions and history and also the specific intellectual milieu these have brought forth. The speech by MacDonald can provide a sample of the latter, to the extent the socialist movement in the British Empire is concerned, even though various conclusions he draws differ considerably from the slogans current among the majority of the socialists in Great Britain.

<sup>22</sup>EB-KK October 26, 1895; Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 31, also quotes the letter. Other references to the MacDonald article are found in KK-EB October 28, 1895, and EB-KK ca. November 4, 1895, DV 344, Kautsky Papers, IISH.

Fabian Society Papers, C 38, Fabian Society Minutes of Meetings 24 April 1891 to 24 January 1896, entry for October 25, 1895. Bernstein is listed among participants in the discussion after MacDonald's address.

According to Bernstein, the Fabians had revolted against sectarianism in the British socialist movement, only themselves to fall into possibilism and nationalism. One would have to see whether the ILP would be the proper combination of the two extremes, but it was a step in the right direction. Following a short sketch of MacDonald's career, Bernstein reminded his German audience that Britain possessed political freedom and representative government, facts crucial for understanding the speech.<sup>23</sup>

Bernstein opposed not only taking Germany as a norm for politics in Great Britain but also proposing reforms which sounded democratic but which were impracticable or ignored material conditions. In his speech, MacDonald addressed both concerns. For example, he criticized the liberals' wish to introduce the run-off election or second ballot. He feared that it would weaken party discipline. He emphatically rejected using Germany as an example:

The situation of German social democracy and its attitude toward the second ballot does not help us much in assessing the likely impact of this system of voting on the socialist movement in England. Our Parliament is thoroughly different from the German Reichstag; our Liberal Party is thoroughly different from the German liberals; and the political tasks before our socialists are thoroughly unlike those facing socialists in Germany.<sup>24</sup>

With this point Bernstein could not have agreed more. In his analysis, the SPD still confronted tasks which formerly belonged to the bourgeoisie; in England these objectives were largely accomplished; new demands proportional to the proletariat's increasing political influence should be found.

MacDonald recommended that English socialists concentrate on political education, on winning followers instead of trying to gain influence through some political artifice. He questioned proportional representation as impractical and specifically dismissed a German proposal to vote by party lists. According to MacDonald, a proportional system might deny local peculiarities. He asserted that the

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<sup>23</sup>James Ramsay MacDonald, "Probleme der Demokratie in England," Eduard Bernstein, tr., *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 357f.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 358-363.

referendum had proven reactionary in Switzerland and that the initiative was no better. MacDonald rejected an "impersonal democracy" which judged a government good because its structure allowed good legislation to be a mechanical process. He labeled this idea, which he feared social democrats were accepting, not "scientific socialism" but "unscientific Radicalism."<sup>25</sup>

Kautsky had advocated parliamentary government while questioning direct democracy. In a letter to his friend, Bernstein pointed out how MacDonald's views on the referendum resembled those of Kautsky. In this respect, MacDonald echoed their concern about the bourgeois-democratic and utopian faith in "the people" which had preceded Marxism in the socialist movement.<sup>26</sup>

MacDonald's organic model suggested to him that a complex society required a "brain"--i.e., statesmen who could handle the affairs of each part of society in the interests of the whole, both elected political leaders and appointed administrators. According to MacDonald, the voter must be distinguished from the legislator; elections should determine that capable persons held office. Administrative positions should not become directly political ones, he believed. But the state official should be in touch with public opinion and be prepared to give a clear report to the House of Commons. MacDonald ended with three complaints against the English socialists, complaints with which Bernstein could agree:

I hope . . . I have succeeded in explaining the importance of the second goal of my deliberations--the protest against the haste with which socialists first cry out in the name of progress various slogans which are really only the warning signals of a party in trouble, second subscribe to certain viewpoints which belong to respectable Radicalism but which are irreconcilable with that system of ideas which has most enriched socialist thought, and third favor certain proposals for governmental reform fitting the pattern of constitutions in

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<sup>25</sup>MacDonald, "Probleme der Demokratie in England," pp. 363-365 and 394-398.

<sup>26</sup>EB-KK November 26, 1895. Earlier, 21.

other countries whose conditions and public temperament are fundamentally different from those of England.<sup>27</sup>

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Not surprisingly, the SDF resented Bernstein's repeated attacks. Its leaders welcomed the publication in Vienna in January 1896 of lectures given by a Dr. Benno Karpeles. *Justice* recalled that the SDF had known that there was no chance of socialists winning in 1895, despite the Liberal defeat. Now Karpeles predicted strong SDF progress. Socialism advanced slowly in Great Britain because the ruling classes talked of "evolution" in place of "revolution" and appeared to sympathize with social-democratic ideas. Karpeles specifically credited the Fabian Society with dulling the class war. The editors of *Justice* prefaced this defense of their viewpoint with the following remarks:

We have suffered so much throughout the history of the S.D.F., for fifteen solid years, from gross and deliberate misrepresentation in Germany that we cordially welcome an honest endeavor on the part of a German resident in England to tell the truth about the English Socialist movement since January 1881. Lately, many efforts have been made by our German comrades in this country to remove the cloud of prejudice which has been raised by one German writer in particular who, unfortunately for the whole international movement, has long held a semi-official position for the German Social-Democratic Party on this side of the North Sea.<sup>28</sup>

Thus by the beginning of 1896 Bernstein had inherited Engels's burden of opposing the SDF and its interpretation of Marxism. While battling David and the "agrarians," Kautsky had deepened his understanding. In struggling with the SDF, Bernstein clarified his own thoughts on what Marx had meant, and on what he had not.

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<sup>27</sup>MacDonald, "Probleme der Demokratie in England," pp. 398-402. See Hirsch, "Bezüglich der Fabian Society," pp. 55f., on ties between Bernstein and MacDonald on the idea of a "socialist state." See below, 323-328.

<sup>28</sup>*Justice*, February 22, 1896, p. 2.

On the one hand, it would appear that Marxism for Bernstein as for Kautsky was not utopian. It possessed a schema (Schablone) neither of class struggle and social evolution leading necessarily to economic crisis and violent revolution nor of a future order to be established overnight. A model of class struggle based on German political conditions might prove inadequate even for Germany, less adequate for other countries. Accordingly, mature Marxism was not a sectarian creed held by a particular party of intellectuals smart enough to comprehend the given schema. It was wrong to conclude that when other parties failed to hold the vision, they formed "one reactionary mass." The Marxism of Kautsky and Bernstein did not advocate violent revolution to realize a utopian ideal or believe that the utopia could be imposed by the state, be that state the present government or a future Dictatorship of the Proletariat. A Marxist analysis did not conclude that Great Britain and Germany were ready to have the model imposed upon them. Tendencies which Marx had identified in capitalism were not completed facts.

On the other hand, it seems that for Kautsky and Bernstein Marxism meant study of the necessary social evolution, driven by economic development and expressed in the class struggle of the proletariat. The historical process would lead to socialism, the achievement of the working class. Social democrats could cooperate with many parties or workers' movements furthering this evolution, cooperate in strengthening the proletariat for future rule or in fulfilling other preconditions for socialism. Great Britain did not require violent political revolution. Trade unions and independent cooperatives could assist the proletariat in its class struggle, help prepare the working class for future rule, and facilitate the coming of socialism under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Finally, a truly Marxist analysis would seek to identify demands appropriate for a given stage of economic, social, and political development; such reforms in Germany might include liberal-democratic ones. With the New Year, the battle against Liebknecht and the SDF would push Bernstein's thinking still further.



## Chapter Four: The Political Crises of 1896

### A. South Africa

The January 1, 1896, issue of *Vorwärts* carried a report dated Pretoria (Transvaal), December 31: Approximately 800 armed men of the Chartered Company had invaded the Transvaal with six Maxim guns and other cannon, headed for Johannesburg; President Kruger had ordered that they be stopped and had called on the Boers to defend their homeland. Ominously, the report concluded that conflict seemed virtually inevitable. Later *Vorwärts* added that the band was led by a Dr. Jameson but that both Cecil Rhodes and the British government denied responsibility. The Boers defeated Jameson and his men on January 2; and on January 3 Emperor Wilhelm II telegraphed President Kruger,

I sincerely congratulate you that without needing to appeal for help from friendly powers you and your people were able through your own strength to re-establish the peace in the face of the armed hords which had broken into your country as disturbers of the peace and were able to guard the independence of your country against foreign attack.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt the thought furthest from the minds of both Jameson and Wilhelm II was the contribution they were making to the history of Marxist theory. Yet, Jameson's raid and Wilhelm II's "Kruger Telegram" played significant roles in socialist intellectual history between Engels's death and the Revisionist Controversy. They were among several major political crises of 1896, the discussion of which produced sharp differences between Kautsky and Bernstein on the one hand and Liebknecht and the SDF on the other. The debates brought Kautsky, Bernstein, and Rosa Luxemburg to develop ideas which figured prominently in the altercation beginning in January 1898.

*Justice* in England and *Vorwärts* in Germany responded very similarly to the Jameson raid, as months later Liebknecht would tell leaders of the SDF. *Justice* claimed that the Boers had fled to the Transvaal in 1834 to escape British domination. It asserted that Englishmen from all parts of society praised their government's

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<sup>1</sup>*Vorwärts*, January 1, 1896, p. 4; *Vorwärts*, January 3, p. 1; *Vorwärts*, January 4, p. 2.

repudiation of Jameson while themselves condemning his allegedly piratical actions. The newspaper expressed admiration for the statesmanlike character of President Kruger. Later it impugned efforts to make Jameson into a patriotic hero:

The leaders of "Dr. Jim's" band, as well as the cowardly crew at Johannesburg, appear to have been actuated by no higher motive than cupidity. They were engaged upon as rascally a piece of sordid plunder as even the annals of capitalist exploitation can boast.

*Vorwärts* was of much the same opinion as *Justice* concerning the alleged depravity of Jameson and his followers. *Vorwärts* disputed Great Britain's claim to sovereignty over the Transvaal. The British had no real reason to be angry about the German Emperor's telegram; they were merely trying to pass blame. While it criticized the tactlessness of Wilhelm II in sending the message, the official organ of the SPD basically ratified its contents.<sup>2</sup>

Bernstein interpreted events in South Africa in a way very different from that of *Justice* and *Vorwärts*, not to mention Wilhelm II. He had followed developments there at least since the autumn of 1895. In the *Neue Zeit* article "The New California" on speculation in South-African mining stock, Bernstein expected a crash. However, he thought that the land of the Dutch farmers would survive, that the country would continue to attract English and other European settlers. Bernstein wrote,

Entrepreneurial spirit and energy which cannot find room for their activities in Europe and civilized states in other parts of the earth will seek it here. With this the course of development of conditions in those states may be temporarily slowed down somewhat, the collapse of the old system somewhat postponed. So what. It seems inevitable that the earth inhabitable by white people must everywhere first be occupied before bourgeois society is ready to be replaced. "A social structure never perishes," says Karl Marx, "before all

<sup>2</sup>*Justice*, January 25, 1896, p. 4. *Vorwärts*, May 23, 1896, p. 9. *Justice*, January 4, 1896, p. 1; *Justice*, January 11, p. 1; *Vorwärts*, January 5, pp. 2f.; *Vorwärts*, January 4, p. 2. See also the editorial on p. 1 of *Justice*, January 25, 1896.

the forces of production are developed for which it is advanced enough."<sup>3</sup>

In this quotation lay a possible answer to the Zusammenbruch question. Bernstein could dismiss the imminent Kladderadatsch but retain the idea that capitalism must eventually end.

Just before Christmas 1895, Bernstein replied to Kautsky that he would be happy to prepare another article on the Transvaal. Writing at the peak of the crisis, Bernstein warned against the anti-British phrases of the German "patriotic" press. Jameson and his men had fought bravely. Bernstein claimed that the Boers were not simple, innocent peasants defending their land. Rather, they had trekked to the Transvaal in 1834 when the British had abolished slavery in the Cape Colony. According to Bernstein, a German newspaper's description of the Boers as lovers of freedom was mere "cant." In the Cape Colony, people wishing to discriminate against the Blacks allied with the English capitalists, he alleged. The Boers' past migrations and their present backwards-looking policies represented, to Bernstein, a utopian attempt to preserve a semi-feudal way of life from modern commerce and industry. But the attempt would prove impossible, Bernstein believed. The Boers had accepted British investments in the Transvaal and had allowed Englishmen to settle in the cities, forming a growing commercial and industrial element.<sup>4</sup>

According to Bernstein, there existed grounds for unrest: The Boers had kept the suffrage to themselves; and they had shifted taxes onto the foreigners, who sometimes suffered arbitrary local administration by the Boers. The English leaders of the aliens in Johannesburg had ruined their movement by giving the Boers excuse to crush them and then by calling on Jameson only to abandon him. They truly deserved their defeat, Bernstein thought. But he added, "I sincerely doubt that the victory of the Boers deserves such rejoicing. It

<sup>3</sup>Bernstein, "Das neue Kalifornien," *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 52-57. EB-KK October 1, 1895. On Bernstein and the Zusammenbruch see earlier, 42f. and 51; and later, 172f. and 175. The Marx quotation resembles a passage found in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859); in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York, 1972), p. 5. See earlier, 22 note 3.

<sup>4</sup>EB-KK December 23, 1895. Bernstein, "Die Kämpfe ums Burenland," *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 484-488.

is certainly clear that the freedom they talk about is not the freedom which progressive Europe seeks." Eventually the Boers would have to surrender their semi-feudal way of life, Bernstein thought. He conceded that the Boers might wish to use Germany against Great Britain. However, he wrote,

In lifestyle, customs, etc. the Boer is much closer to the Englishman than to the modern German; English institutions are much more appealing to him than are German ones. One exception is the question of treatment of the Blacks. But when official Germany feels for the Boer on this point, for the German workers the family tie ends precisely here. And likewise if the celebration of the Boers' victory should be only the prelude for new England baiting, or worse. England may stand in the way of the appetites of German and French colony hunters; but it is the country in whose colonies greater freedom of movement and more thorough equality of rights exist for the foreigner than in the colonies of any other country.

Bernstein believed that little could be more tragic than to risk Germany's real ties to England, to become enemies of the most advanced European people, in favor of a supposed blood relationship to a backwards peasant aristocracy: "The idea is too monstrous seriously to give it room."<sup>5</sup>

In an unsigned *Vorwärts* article that followed shortly, Bernstein sought to counter what to him were misconceptions of the English response both to the Jameson raid and to the German Emperor's message. The British government was not responsible for Jameson, Bernstein claimed. Most newspapers had condemned the raid until the "Kruger Telegram" brought a major change, with much of the press now favoring Great Britain's approaching Russia.<sup>6</sup>

To an extent, Bernstein's countering *Vorwärts* succeeded. It recognized German ties to Great Britain, agreed that the "Kruger Telegram" challenged what the British perceived as their rights over the Transvaal, and condemned the German conservative press for virulently

<sup>5</sup>Bernstein, "Die Kämpfe ums Burenland," pp. 488-490.

<sup>6</sup>Anonymous [Bernstein], "England und die Transvaal-Krisis," *Vorwärts*, January 9, pp. 1f.

attacking England and thus generating British hostility toward Germany. Still, *Vorwärts* also carried statements alleging that the pro-English National Union movement in Johannesburg had been only for the capitalists, explaining the "Kruger Telegram" as an answer to pleas for protection from Germans in South Africa, reporting that the British government was beginning to take responsibility for Jameson, and dismissing the right of Englishmen in the Transvaal to immediate citizenship there.<sup>7</sup>

On January 30 Bernstein wrote Kautsky complaining of *Vorwärts*'s position on South Africa and on Germany's relationship to Great Britain in general. He reported that he had sent in two articles but that both were "confiscated." Bebel had explained that there were people whom Liebknecht could not circumvent, though he personally disagreed. Bernstein felt it sad that on this critical issue the party lacked strong leadership. He promised Kautsky another essay on South Africa, on what Bernstein found to be the "most fateful occurrence for Germany since 1871."<sup>8</sup>

In his article Bernstein criticized the German "colonialist" newspapers which spoke of England when they meant the South-Africa Company. To oppose this obfuscation, he believed, required seeking clarity about the situation. According to Bernstein, Great Britain did have rights over the Transvaal; and to ignore them offended the British. Admittedly, many in Britain looked forward to a confederation of South-African provinces including the Transvaal. However, opinion was divided over how to accomplish the union: The chauvinists said smash the Boers; the Liberals hoped for a natural and voluntary process. Hence the Liberal press sincerely denounced the Jameson raid. Bernstein defended the party,

At any rate one may not judge the Liberals of today's England according to slogans of past ages or to Continental examples nor underestimate the strength of character of those elements which constitute the backbone of the Liberal Party—I mean the much-derided "Gewissen der Nonkonformisten." Often misled, this "nonconformist conscience" has repeatedly

<sup>7</sup>*Vorwärts*, January 15, 1896, p. 2; January 17, pp. 1f.; January 26, p. 1; January 28, pp. 1f.; January 29, p. 2; January 31, p. 3; February 2, 1896, pp. 2f.

<sup>8</sup>EB-KK January 30, 1896.



proven itself a force to which the most powerful statesmen had to give way.

Bernstein said that it was the nonconformist peace party that had brought Gladstone to grant a generous treaty to the Boers in 1881. Bernstein compared this peace movement in 1881 to that of the German social democrats against continuing the war in 1870-71. Because of their stance following Sedan, he thought, the social-democrats became internationally known for desiring peace.<sup>9</sup>

According to Bernstein, the German government's mistake in 1871 led to the alliance of France and Russia, from which both countries had benefited greatly. It appeared that Germany had supported the Sultan in resisting reforms on behalf of the Armenians. The only escape from the quandary which Bernstein could see, short of returning Alsace-Lorraine, would have been for Germany to ally with Great Britain. Bernstein knew Conservatives there who had wanted it; then the "Kruger Telegram" occurred.

Not just the Jameson gang was at stake, but several thousand English citizens in the Transvaal and England's whole official relationship to the Transvaal which was called into question by Jameson's prank. At such a moment the above-mentioned telegram could not be understood other than the way the English did, especially considering the surrounding circumstances. Surely no one believes that the anti-English articles of the German colonial press have remained a secret to the English.

Bernstein disagreed with two letters published in *Vorwärts* January 28 from Germans in the Transvaal. Bernstein insisted that the suffrage agitation was not simply a device of Rhodes, that the problem had been debated for years, that in England aliens voted in local elections. He did not excuse the English leaders in Johannesburg, but neither did he approve the Germans there appealing to the Emperor for protection. Bernstein warned that international relations had entered a transition period during which hostility between Germany and Britain would help France and especially Russia. Germans must show they meant no

<sup>9</sup>Bernstein, "Die Transvaalwirren und ihr internationaler Rückschlag," *Neue Zeit*, XIVa (1895-96), 612-616. See also P. Angel, *Eduard Bernstein et l'Evolution du Socialisme Allemand* (Paris, 1961), p. 147.

harm to British interests. Social democrats could best do so by criticizing those inciting hatred in Germany; they could leave to the English socialists the task of criticizing Jameson and Rhodes. Bernstein reminded his readers, "Today German social democracy is a major party, and with its size has grown its responsibility, too."<sup>10</sup>

When Bernstein's article arrived in Stuttgart in early February, Kautsky found it excellent. In the Reichstag Bebel presented views similar to Bernstein's.<sup>11</sup>

Bax and other SDF leaders disagreed with Bernstein; and through the late winter and spring of 1896, they published their alternative viewpoint. In an article on February 15, Bax agreed that socialists should first gainsay the jingoism of their own nationalists. Then he went much further than Bernstein. He denied that in foreign affairs the proletariat possessed any national interest:

We may dismiss very shortly, from a Socialist point of view, phrases such as "one's own country," the "supremacy of England," "national prestige," "England's place among the nations," etc., when used in this connection. They simply refer to the amount of profit which the capitalists of this country can retain in the channels leading to their own pockets, or can divert from the pockets of the capitalists of other countries into their own. This is the aim of the foreign policy of all Governments—Tory, Liberal, Radical, or what not. The whole question of foreign relations at present simply turns on a dispute between the agents of rival profit-mongers, each anxious to secure for his own firm the lion's share of the world's surplus-value, but all determined to stand together against the Proletariat.

Bax asserted that the duty of each socialist was to be an anti-patriot, opposed to national pretensions and bourgeois patriotism. "'Any other country but one's own' is not such a bad motto after all for a Socialist foreign policy," he wrote. Bax doubted that any one nation was leading the way to socialism:

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 617-620.

<sup>11</sup>KK-EB February 2, 1896. ZSAM, Ministerium des Innern, Rep. 77, Tit. CB S, Nr. 96/1, Bl. 18; an article from the *Kölnische Volks-Zeitung* of February 16, 1896.

I maintain there is no one nationality at present existing so super-eminently excellent as to have a right to claim by virtue of its national characteristics any prominent or definitive leadership in the transition from modern capitalist civilization to Socialism.

Bax finished by comparing Great Britain to Russia. Socialists would want to see Russia limited,

But the extension of the area of British hypocrisy and cant, conjoined with the vulgarity and sordid methods of Anglo-Saxon aggressive commercialism and the type of character they engender, is an evil not many degrees less.<sup>12</sup>

In March *Justice* asked what British laborers had to be patriotic about. They should transform their hatred of the foreigner into hatred of the class enemy at home, it advised. Then in April *Justice* mentioned arming African natives to resist European colonialism:

What the native races want is a few adventurous and justice-loving Europeans of some military capacity and knowledge who will teach them how to handle a rifle and give them some lessons in drilling and the evolution of modern warfare—and the boundless but useless bravery with which these poor wretches run on certain death in defense of land and liberty—the sickening tale of an "action" in which 150 natives are killed to one white man slightly wounded—would then be put an end to, . . . We are aware that in the long run the issue may possibly be the same, but the gain of time thus given would afford a chance at least for the invaded, and from a Socialist point of view may make the difference of hastening the downfall of the capitalistic system whose prime and pressing necessity is now the "opening-up" of new countries.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>E. Belfort Bax, "Socialism and Foreign Politics," *Justice*, February 15, 1896, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>*Justice*, March 28, 1896, p. 4; *Justice*, April 25, 1896, p. 1.

In an extended editorial in the May Day number of *Justice*, Bax further developed the point. Colonial expansion was to preserve capitalism, he claimed. Capitalism required new markets for its shoddy products and new supplies of cheap labor. The emigration associated with empire helped get rid of troublemakers. Hence, Bax reasoned, the native populations and the European proletariat had similar interests. The natives fought capitalism for the sake of a primitive communism; the proletariat fought for a post-capitalist one. Bax believed communism inevitable. But, he wrote,

the result may be retarded, the present system of exploitation and wage-slavery may be maintained for a generation or longer yet by the sweeping away of the independence of the savage and barbaric peoples of the earth and the opening-up of their territories to European commerce and industry.<sup>14</sup>

In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels had said that cyclical business crises might be delayed by the opening of new markets, though a more severe crisis would follow. In the *Anti-Dühring* and in his 1886 Foreword to the English edition of *Capital*, Engels had mentioned crises and chronic business depression from increases in production outpacing the growth of the market. But should social democrats promote such crises by seeking to halt the expansion of capitalism? Bax maintained,

. . . it is clearly the interest of Socialists and of the working-class movement generally to make common cause with these primitive peoples—barbarian or savage, as we term them—who are resisting the invasion of their ancestral tribal lands and overturning of their old social customs and constitution by hordes of hired ruffians and buccaneers sent by European Governments to clear the way for Capitalism with Maxims and new-pattern rifles.

For example, Europeans might train the natives in the use of firearms. Bax proposed a resolution for the International Congress meeting that

<sup>14</sup>"The True Aims of 'Imperial Extension' and 'Colonial Enterprise,'" *Justice*, May 1, 1896, pp. 7f. Bax is also quoted by Hans-Christoph Schröder, *Sozialistische Imperialismusdeutung. Studien zur ihrer Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1973), pp. 78-80, who mentions the debate.

year in London to the effect that colonialism prolonged capitalism and that the European workers should ally with the native peoples.<sup>15</sup>

In late May Bernstein chose to reply to Bax in *Vorwärts*. In an unsigned article Bernstein argued that the SPD had a responsibility to shape German public opinion on foreign policy, that merely criticizing past government actions no longer sufficed. Accordingly, social democrats must develop their own foreign policy, one which recognized true national interests; they dare not ignore nationalism. In Bernstein's opinion, Bax's recent proposal opposed colonialism without regard to national interests. The International Congress would probably reject the proposal. To Bernstein it appeared not well thought out to begin with:

It is contradictory and utopian. It means going against the inevitable development of things—an undertaking which has been tried in the most varied forms for generations and has failed each time. If our federation were indeed capable of strengthening the resistance by the savages or barbarians, this would only bring about the opposite of what Bax desires; instead of accelerating, it would delay the collapse of the capitalist era.

As the native people sought to buy ammunition for their new weapons, Bernstein observed, they became more involved with the commercial system.<sup>16</sup>

Apparently, Bernstein now believed that capitalism would expand until it reached a point of furthest development and Zusammenbruch unless superseded earlier by proletarian rule and a transition to socialism. The growth of capital produced the working class, the social wealth, and the other material preconditions needed for proletarian rule and socialization. Either way, delaying capital expansion delayed the end of capitalism. It was utopian to think that

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<sup>15</sup>"The True Aims," pp. 7f. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 340; *Marx-Engels Werke*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, ed. (Berlin, 1957ff.), XX, 257, and XXIII, 39f. See also E. Belfort Bax, "The Cult of Abstractions," *Justice*, October 19, 1895, p. 4. Above, 41.

<sup>16</sup>Anonymous [Bernstein], "Die internationale Politik der Sozialdemokratie vor dem Londoner Sozialistenkongreß," *Vorwärts*, May 24, p. 2.

within a capitalist system and before the proletariat came to power an essential quality of capital, its expansion, could be prohibited.<sup>17</sup>

In *Vorwärts* Bernstein wrote that Bax's proposal to stop capitalist expansion could be carried out by social democrats only when they held power to shape laws in the European countries. Until then they could join with other political parties to enact laws protecting native populations, "but laws which forbid capitalist society its further extension social democrats will not be able to pass before they no longer have need to do so." Here one might recall Kautsky's distinction between laws protecting laborers and laws trying to preserve the peasant farm or Bernstein's concern that the SPD make demands corresponding to the proletariat's actual strength. In their way of thinking, the advance of capital would end after the workers had conquered political power; but then capitalism would become socialism. There was no necessity of a catastrophe before the proletariat could take power or socialization could occur. Bernstein deemed Bax's proposal to be as mistaken as an earlier opposition to emigration for its spreading capitalism and delaying revolution.

Each attempt to draw a Chinese Wall (or, if you will, a barbarian wall) around the capitalist world until the socialist revolution is completed must especially today remain fruitless, as this world has since grown larger and the means of transportation have been perfected. The Gordian knot will not be cut in this way.<sup>18</sup>

For purposes of discussion, Bernstein liked the foreign policy described in a recent article by Jean Jaurès, who agreed that mere protest was insufficient. But Jaurès went on to state that while social democrats opposed the way in which colonialism presently occurred, they did not deny the right to have colonies—to extend civilization, as he saw it. Much as Bernstein had done in his first article on South Africa, Jaurès appealed to the idea that capitalism must actualize its potential. He reasoned that if a more advanced democratic country refused to have colonies this did not lessen the barbarity of colonialism, for less advanced nations would pursue it. Social-democratic

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<sup>17</sup>Compare earlier, 164f.; and later, 175.

<sup>18</sup>Anonymous [Bernstein], "Die internationale Politik der Sozialdemokratie vor dem Londoner Sozialistenkongreß," p. 2.



opposition to colonialism might unleash chauvinism. Jaurès proposed three guidelines: (a) Socialists should see that colonialism did not lead to war; they could do so only if they carefully studied colonial policies in order to oppose the exaggerated claims of their own nation.

(b) They should always seek the good of the native populations; socialists should not fear that a humanitarian appeal might cloak some vested national interest. (c) Socialists should try to turn important economic matters into international concerns under common regulation; for example, the entire Nile River could be internationally supervised.<sup>19</sup>

Bernstein admitted that much of what Jaurès said might seem too optimistic. Jaurès made his proposals for a democratic republic in which social democrats had great influence. Bernstein recognized, "In a despotic country where the ruler's will is supreme law, democrats will have to refuse support to many things against which, under different circumstances, they would not have been simply opposed." For Bernstein the immediate question was not whether colonialism was ultimately right or wrong but rather what socialists could do in accord with their principles for the sake of peace.<sup>20</sup> One can see how the answer for him might vary dramatically between countries like France and Germany. As in the agrarian issue, some reforms allowed in a democratic republic were problematic under a reactionary monarchy.

Kautsky approved Bernstein's reply to Bax. "You splendidly checked Bax in 'Vorw.,'" Kautsky wrote. "The leading English socialists really are only adventurers and not politicians, except for Burns and a few Fabians." Bax's response, almost a month later, was indirect. On June 29 Bernstein asked Kautsky if he had read this

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous [Bernstein], "Die internationale Politik der Sozialdemokratie vor dem Londoner Sozialistenkongreß," *Vorwärts*, May 27, 1896, pp. 1f.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1f. Hans-Christoph Schröder, "Eduard Bernsteins Stellung zum Imperialismus vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus. Bericht über den wissenschaftlichen Kongreß "Die historische Leistung und aktuelle Bedeutung Eduard Bernsteins,"* Horst Heimann and Thomas Meyer, eds. (Bonn - Bad Godesberg, 1978), p. 184. For further discussion of the positions of Bax and Jaurès on colonial policy, see Hans-Holger Paul, *Marx, Engels und die Imperialismustheorie der 2. Internationale* (Hamburg, 1978), pp. 126-128.

reply. Bernstein concluded, "That the higher culture has rights over against the lower is not recognized by these Fleet Street socialists."<sup>21</sup>

Bax and Bernstein held different visions of the advent of socialism. Bax expected the economic collapse of capitalism as prelude to social revolution. Bourgeois society was not the foundation of democracy and socialism but rather an evil to be escaped. If colonialism delayed the business crises which he apparently supposed led to the catastrophe, then social democrats should fight colonialism abroad to hasten crises and collapse at home.<sup>22</sup> In his articles on South Africa, Bernstein implicitly dismissed the imminent collapse—be it the necessary one of Bax or the accidental one of Bebel. To Bernstein, it was not a prerequisite to the proletariat's conquest of political power and the transition to socialism; it was not a tenet of historical materialism, anyway. With this view Bernstein did not rule out the position later held by Luxemburg—that if the proletariat never intervened, theoretically capitalism would eventually perish of its own at some point of full development. And of course, Bernstein allowed that an unforeseen disaster might occur.<sup>23</sup> However, he did not believe that social democrats could wait for the former event or count on the latter accident. He thought that they needed to strive now to realize the preconditions of proletarian rule and socialism. In any case, Marx himself had argued that up to a point the extension of capitalism was inevitable. In his own mind at least, Bernstein could disagree with Bax and Bebel on this issue but still follow Marx.

<sup>21</sup> KK-EB June 2, 1896; see also EB-KK June 6, 1896. EB-KK June 29, 1896. E. Belfort Bax, "South Africa Again!" *Justice*, June 27, 1896, p. 4. On Bernstein's views on the supposed rights of advanced cultures, see later, 226f.

<sup>22</sup> See above, 38-41.

<sup>23</sup> For Luxemburg's view, see earlier, 40; and later, 197 note 16 and 222.

## B. Saxony

For many years the SPD in Saxony had won an increasing number of seats in the lower chamber of the provincial diet. So in late 1895 powerful leaders sought to introduce a three-class franchise like that in Prussia. *Vorwärts* estimated that the change would in effect nullify the vote of 80% of the electorate. The SPD led the outcry. On January 5, 1896, Liebknecht addressed a rally of 15,000 in Leipzig. The proletariat faced one united opposition, he said, for the bourgeois opposed the suffrage even more than did the Junkers. The bourgeois would attempt to maintain their dictatorship over the workers. Since the bourgeois could not provoke rebellion, he surmised, they attacked the workers' most important right, the suffrage. The laborers did not need violent revolution as long as they had an effective vote; but abolishing equal suffrage could mean violence in the future, he warned.<sup>1</sup>

Public protest quickly spread, bringing the formation of a short-lived Suffrage League under Bruno Schönlanke. The protest front included non-proletarian elements. For example, *Vorwärts* reported that the editor of a Protestant workers' periodical had lost his position when he defended the existing suffrage. On February 2 *Vorwärts* claimed that some conservatives disliked the change; Bebel suggested that even the King of Saxony accepted the status quo. Social democrats asked whether the proposed alteration of the Saxon constitution was not part of a movement to abolish the Reichstag suffrage too, through a coup d'état if necessary.<sup>2</sup>

When the suffrage bill appeared on February 5, 1896, it outraged social democrats. *Vorwärts* argued that the minimum income for the second class being 2800 Marks placed laborers in the third class. Since its electors would then be outvoted by those representing the first

<sup>1</sup>*Vorwärts*, January 7, 1896, pp. 2f. See also *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, ed. (Berlin, 1974), Series I, Vol. III, no. 256, pp. 449f.: "Resolution einer Versammlung am 5. Januar 1896 in Leipzig gegen die Einführung des Dreiklassenwahlrechts für die Wahlen zum Landtag in Sachsen." *Vorwärts*, March 4, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>*Vorwärts*, January 9, 1896; January 10, p. 2; January 21, p. 3; January 30, p. 3; February 2, p. 3; February 4, p. 2; February 11, p. 3.

and second classes, the number of SPD seats could be severely reduced. On February 6 *Vorwärts* promised action:

It is true that the workers have the "right" to vote; however, they are regularly outvoted 2 to 1 and thus their vote is null and void. A fake right is even worse than naked lack of rights, for it adds ridicule to injustice. The workers of Saxony will not long remain owing an appropriate response. And behind them stands the working class of all of Germany.

On February 8 *Vorwärts* portrayed a storm of protest and declared that the whole Saxon people were aroused. "The social-democratic movement is a people's movement." The paper now admitted that many bourgeois opposed the new suffrage. The language of *Vorwärts* became strident:

Well—we wash our hands in innocence. May those responsible for the murderous attack bear the consequences! The battle is inflamed; the bullet is out of the barrel. The people of Saxony will not be overcome, and—no matter how the fight ends—social democracy has the victory and success.

On February 14 *Vorwärts* claimed that the protest movement was the largest uprising since the Revolution of 1848.

The people are forced to fight the government. And there will not be peace in the country until either the resistance of the people has been broken and the peace of the graveyard has been established or the existing electoral injustice has been swept away.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, for all its vehement wording, apparently *Vorwärts* made no concrete proposals for action beyond the SPD's traditional ones such as rallies, petitions, leaflets, and formal speeches by representatives in the diet.

Desire for a more-drastic response increased as it became apparent that the suffrage legislation would be enacted. On February 23 *Vorwärts* reported that a provincial conference of Saxon social

<sup>3</sup>*Vorwärts*, February 6, 1896, p. 2; February 8, p. 1; February 14, p. 2; February 22, p. 1.

democrats would meet to settle on a strategy and that two newspapers, the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, had proposed that the current SPD delegates abandon their mandates and walk out of the diet. The tactic implied not participating in future elections under the new suffrage. *Vorwärts* endorsed the plan and reported the following argument for it: "For to have our representation in the diet hacked up piecemeal would not be worthy of our party." On February 25 *Vorwärts* added that public anger would produce victory in Saxony in the next Reichstag elections. However, in April the provincial conference instructed the delegates to keep their mandates and decided that the SPD should enter future diet elections also.<sup>4</sup>

By then the suffrage bill had become law. According to *Vorwärts*, the diet committee which considered the legislation justified it as necessary to stop the social democrats who allegedly wished to destroy everything and who were winning more and more votes. Six large protest gatherings met in Dresden on March 4. Each ratified a resolution saying,

The assembly declares especially that it rejects the accusations against social democracy by those who destroy electoral rights, for example that social democracy wishes to "overturn everything" and "destroy all state order," as vile slanders and an excuse to establish the absolute power of capital. Instead, the assembly affirms that it sees in social democracy the party which has always relentlessly fought to improve the condition of the working class and which instead of "destroying order" wishes to create a new order in place of today's capitalistic disorder, under which millions of workers are exposed to the most grave suffering of all sorts and are excluded from enjoying the benefits of civilization.

After the bill passed the lower chamber on March 6, *Vorwärts* promised, "... the Saxon comrades, supported by social democrats throughout the rest of Germany, will in unity and solidarity do their duty and lead the battle to a victorious end." Still *Vorwärts* did not disclose what acts to consider beyond walking out of the diet and

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<sup>4</sup>*Vorwärts*, February 23, 1896, pp. 2f.; *Vorwärts*, February 25, p. 1; *Vorwärts*, April 10, 1896, p. 2.

boycotting future elections. Finally, the bill passed the upper chamber on March 18 and was accepted by the king yet that month.<sup>5</sup>

After reviewing the memoirs of the English agitator George Jacob Holyoak for *Neue Zeit* in late March 1896, Bernstein denounced the Saxon suffrage bill as a savage violation of a fundamental civil right. Then in a *Neue Zeit* article specifically on the Saxon crisis, Bernstein asserted that the suffrage reform was infamous, unheard of in time of social peace. It demanded a strong response, Bernstein said; and he asked whether everything possible had been attempted. Bernstein regretted,

People repeatedly have made the mistake of setting up two absolute opposites—as if it were only a matter of holding the mandates in the old fashion or laying them down, of voting as always or refusing to vote. Are there not other possible responses to the humiliation inflicted upon the workers of Saxony, apart from these two alternatives?<sup>6</sup>

Bernstein provided historical examples of the more-radical measures he had in mind. Instead of there being "one reactionary mass" in favor of altering the suffrage, as Liebknecht had at first implied, Bernstein noted that many bourgeois politicians disapproved the change. The longer the new legislation took in the diet, the more they raised opposition to it, and the worse its prospects became. Social-democratic delegates might have considered the kind of filibuster used by Parnell, Bernstein suggested.

Let me remind you of the memorable sessions of the English Parliament where the Irish members gave speeches lasting six, eight, ten, and twelve hours rather than one or two; where it happened that one session of Parliament was drawn out over more than 41 hours; of the session where one day (February 3, 1881) 36 Irish members, one after the other, had to be

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<sup>5</sup>*Vorwärts*, March 4, 1896, p. 1; March 6, p. 2; March 7, p. 2; March 20, p. 2; March 29, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, "Die Sozialdemokratie und das neue Landtagswahl-system in Sachsen," *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 181-183. Bernstein, "Aus früheren Kämpfen. Allerlei aus den Erinnerungen eines englischen Agitators," *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 18.



parliamentarily suspended and removed from the House with force before it could finish its business. They shook the countryside into alertness; they strengthened the spirit of resistance and the power to resist in the country; they appealed persistently to the mind and conscience of the nation and thus helped create the kind of environment in which Ireland was given one concession after the other.

If such a tactic had been possible in Saxony, then it would have been called for, according to Bernstein. He explained,

The unusual occasion demanded and justified unusual methods, and thousands and thousands who heard or read hardly any of the excellent speeches of the social-democratic representatives would have been forced to hear about them and to think about the dirty blow that was dealt.

Bernstein thought that social democrats should have transformed the Saxon legislature into a platform from which to address the people.<sup>7</sup>

In Bernstein's opinion, social democrats could have attempted more-strenuous actions outside parliament, too. He maintained:

Different general conditions, a different method of fighting. It is not a matter of specific single measures, rather very generally of the question whether it is justified under all circumstances to limit oneself to the written or spoken word or whether there does not exist a middle path between this and accepting the brutal challenge of the Saxon reactionaries "to face the rifles."

Bernstein referred to the agitation of the English middle classes culminating in the Reform Bill of 1832, and he pointed to a recent use of the mass strike.

In our own time Belgium has shown us how to achieve great and positive success by adding the political strike to these methods. Two years ago in this paper, I tried to prove that

<sup>7</sup>Bernstein, "Die Sozialdemokratie und das neue Landtagswahl-system in Sachsen," pp. 183f. Liebknecht's first assessment is earlier, 176.

although the general strike as envisioned by the anarchists is highly utopian, because of this the strike still need not be altogether useless as a political weapon, rather may be very appropriate under certain circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

For the reactionary conditions in Germany, Bernstein considered even the mass strike—extra-parliamentary, potentially revolutionary, and possibly violent.

Having offered suggestions for action, Bernstein criticized the two tactics of surrendering the current diet mandates and of boycotting future elections. Two reasons had been given for leaving the diet—that of honor and that of the current social-democratic delegation's lacking influence. Bernstein contended, "Nothing is more misleading than the slogan about dignity, which moreover in general those people throw around the most who themselves possess the least of the article itself." As for the second argument, the social democrats in the diet could use it for agitation. In contrast, walking out was one of the least telling measures, in Bernstein's opinion; refusing to participate in elections, perhaps even less so. For him, a better protest would be to take part, to win the majority of the popular vote, and then to show how the third-class electors were defeated by those of the first and second classes. "This shocks, this provokes, this is the permanent, the vivid demonstration of the electoral injustice of the three-class election." Concerning *Vorwärts's* proposal to concentrate on the Reichstag elections, Bernstein agreed that the crisis in Saxony would lead to victories there, but he warned that the Reichstag suffrage was not inviolable.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Bernstein, "Die Sozialdemokratie und das neue Landtagswahl-system in Sachsen," pp. 184f. For further views of Bernstein on the mass strike, see his "Der Strike als politisches Kampfmittel," *Neue Zeit*, XIIa (1893-94), 689-695; and also EB-KK November 4, 1893; EB-KK February 10, 1894; and EB-KK February 27, 1894. On Bernstein and the mass strike see Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism. Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1962), pp. 237-243. See also Detlef Lehnert, "Die Rezeption Bernsteins in der 'linken' Kritik," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, p. 373.

<sup>9</sup>Bernstein, "Die Sozialdemokratie und das neue Landtagswahl-system in Sachsen," pp. 185-187.

When arguing against participation in future Saxon diet elections, Schönlanck had cited the decisive defeat in 1893 of the proposal to participate in the Prussian ones. Hence Bernstein defended his earlier idea:

I had admitted from the beginning that great hesitations would stand in the way of my proposal. When I nonetheless decided to step forward with it, I was led to do so primarily by the conviction that if we do not want to wait for the renowned day of the great Kladderadatsch, we can do nothing against the three-class electoral system unless it be by our breaking through it as it is, pushing it in itself *ad absurdum*. My proposal came unexpectedly and too late for the imminent campaign; the party organ moved against it with the heaviest artillery; it fell. In Cologne it was buried. No participation in the elections, no action which might require a compromise, but thorough and energetic agitation for introducing universal, etc. suffrage in the diet—this was the refrain of the dirge to which the proposal was carried to its grave.

What has happened since with this so vehemently introduced "but"? Nothing, nothing, and again nothing!

Bernstein dismissed the contention that compromise in diet elections would necessarily bring the sacrifice of principles. He claimed that the Belgian and French socialist parties had won immensely without sacrificing the least part of their programs. Bernstein insisted,

A party which knows what it wants and is based on a clear understanding of the social context really does not need to fear that a compromise will damage its soul. The fear of occasional compromise is anything but evidence that we trust in the strength of the social-democratic teachings.

Bernstein also questioned the supposition that the advanced stage of Germany's economic evolution made reform efforts superfluous. In industrial development Belgium was not behind Germany, Bernstein observed. It was the reactionary political constitution of Germany, not its economy, that created polarization. Bernstein wrote,

In Germany people have gotten far too used to blaming quickly the stage of economic development for things which

have much more to do with the backwardness of political conditions, pure emanations of the police and bureaucratic spirit, than with anything else—deducing from the decree of some obscure mayor the imminent demise of the bourgeois world. I have every reason to judge this mildly, for I have sinned in the same way. But I must warn against the custom nonetheless. The political Reaction in Germany is no measure of the degree of its economic disintegration; other factors play a role too. Social democracy thus has more to take into account than today and tomorrow. We have no infallible measure for the expansion for which the bourgeois society is still capable. Be it close to or far from its limits, in any case we must look after the interests of the proletariat in all areas of public life, strengthen it economically when possible, and expand its political power as much as possible.<sup>10</sup>

The number of social-democratic Reichstag votes, the viciousness of the police state—neither convinced Bernstein that the existing social and economic system faced imminent collapse. One could assume that time remained for the SPD in cooperation with other parties to fight for a democratic republic and for reforms which would strengthen the proletariat for the conquest of political power. The actual practice of the SPD—including its daily toil in parliament, diets, local councils, and trade unions—contributed to reaching the socialist goal. The movement made up of such practices was more valuable, in Bernstein's eyes, than empty slogans about "the class struggle" and "the renowned day of the great Kladderadatsch." In this emphasis on the movement itself lay an early foreshadowing of the latter half of Bernstein's controversial statement in January 1898 which denied "what is commonly understood by 'final goal of socialism'" while affirming the "movement." The presentiment in 1896 formed a bridge, perhaps, between Besant's 1889 *Fabian Essay* and Bernstein's 1898 polemic against Bax. The other half of the 1898 statement crystallized in writings which immediately followed the discussion of Saxony, in debates on Poland and Turkey.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 186-188. See earlier, 41 and 43.

<sup>11</sup>See earlier, 123f.; and later, 393-406 and particularly the quotation on 230. About Besant as a possible source of Bernstein's idea



Bernstein's reply to Schönbank raised the central issues of correctly identifying a country's stage in the historical process leading to socialism and of making demands appropriate to that stage. If one confused the Zusammenbruch occurring before the proletariat conquered political power with the transformation of capitalism into socialism, which Kautsky and Bernstein thought would occur only later under proletarian rule, then the belief that the collapse was imminent would require the conviction that the capitalist economy was ready for transition. Demands suitable to socialism would be in order; an intense class conflict would be expected; a mature and united proletariat would be assumed.

Bernstein rejected the notion that Germany's economy was particularly mature, certainly not when compared to Great Britain's or Belgium's. The SPD faced a front of hostile parties because of Germany's political backwardness, not because of its economic advancement. Bernstein's view had two immediate consequences: First, because of this special political-economic situation, the proletariat must carry out tasks traditionally the responsibility of the bourgeoisie—like winning an equal suffrage in Prussia. Second, since capitalism did not necessarily face an imminent collapse, presumably there remained time to carry out such improvements. It was as wrong to delay liberal-democratic reforms until after the proletariat had taken power as it was wrong to request reforms appropriate to socialism from a Junker or bourgeois government.

Bernstein struggled with the problem of shaping demands to fit a specific economic stage while he wrestled with editing Louis Hérítier's history of the 1848 Revolution in France, a task taking much of 1896. During this endeavor Bernstein obtained a new picture of the French socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. On the question of which demands were appropriate in 1848, Bernstein found Proudhon almost always right, in contrast to Louis-Auguste Blanqui and his followers.<sup>12</sup>

Bernstein shared his concern with Kautsky in a letter on June 19, 1896. Bernstein noted for Kautsky that Proudhon's wish to socialize only the large monopolies had become the position of the French Marxists. Bernstein believed this goal to be all that was needed or justified. "Have I thus turned petite bourgeois? I do not think so.

of "the movement," see Bo Gustafsson, *Marxismus und Revisionismus. Eduard Bernsteins Kritik des Marxismus und ihre ideengeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*, Holger Heide, tr. (Frankfurt/M., 1972), pp. 175f.

<sup>12</sup>EB-KK June 19, 1896. About Hérítier, see later, 311-317.

I only see the development of things through different eyes." It was understandable that in an earlier economic period Proudhon had asked for no more than partial socialization. Bernstein judged that Proudhon had often been right but that he stated his position poorly. Here one is reminded perhaps of the 1895 Introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*, where Engels admitted that the later expansion of capital had shown that the French economy was not ready for socialization in mid-century.<sup>13</sup>

Kautsky replied on June 24 that he agreed with Bernstein in respect to the present. However, once the proletariat had taken power, the workers' demands would eliminate profits, and production with wage labor would become impossible. Kautsky shared his vision of capitalists asking the government to assume control of industries for reasonable compensation. In this way, socialization could occur without expropriation. Private production with little wage labor could continue, but it would depend on the socialized enterprises, and eventually all production would be state run. Kautsky said that he had intended to develop the idea in an article "On the Day After the Revolution," "in which I wanted to show that out of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, without a plan for a future order (Zukunftsstaat) coming into play, the socialist society must grow with natural necessity."<sup>14</sup> Here Kautsky reconfirmed that mature Marxism had no model to impose. He granted the state an indirect role in the transformation—assisting the proletariat instead of repressing it. In socializing production, the government would more respond to changes in the economy than impose them.

On June 29 Bernstein answered that he concurred with Kautsky, up to a point:

What you wrote about the day after the Kladderadatsch I had already thought myself, but there is a big "if." Precisely because the workers will come forward with . . . exaggerated demands, a grandiose failure with obligatory set-backs is . . .

<sup>13</sup>EB-KK June 19, 1896. About Engels's Introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*, see earlier, 55-58.

<sup>14</sup>KK-EB June 24, 1896. See also Kautsky, *Die soziale Revolution* (Berlin, 1902), Vol. II, "Am Tage nach der Revolution," p. 8.



easily possible. The question is certainly not so simple, and precisely this is what makes me feel so doubtful.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps Bernstein's fear was that if the laborers had grown accustomed to expecting too much too soon from the state, they might demand more than it could or should provide. To protect Kautsky's gradual socialization under a Dictatorship of the Proletariat, one should encourage workers to rely more on their own efforts and organizations—trade unions, cooperatives, local government, etc.—and not on the state. Especially in Great Britain where the proletariat was gaining political influence and its conquest of power was nearing, one should seek that the laborers' expectations did not overlook their personal responsibility to provide for their families. Bernstein confided to Kautsky,

I am beginning--please do not faint--to tend toward "anarchistic communism." Maybe it is only a mood, but it stirs me up inside, and much of what I . . . see reinforces my doubts. Read the resolutions to the International Congress. What an assault on the state as a general fodder box!<sup>16</sup>

In the months ahead Bernstein would often return to this concern. It was more than the old SPD hostility to state socialism, which applied less and less in Great Britain. Apparently, it presumed that at least there the proletariat was approaching political control but that the economy was not yet ready for total socialization; hence it presumed that the workers might need to rule for a time over a mixed economy with privately-owned production; it presumed what Kautsky understood to be the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Kautsky had come to focus on this transitional phase during the agrarian debates; Bernstein rediscovered its importance while he struggled with the question of finding demands appropriate to a particular stage of economic evolution. Both realized that truly socialist reforms were needed only in a capitalist or mixed economy, but possible only under proletarian rule.

<sup>15</sup>EB-KK June 29, 1896.

<sup>16</sup>EB-KK June 29, 1896. Thomas Meyer, *Bernsteins konstruktiver Sozialismus. Eduard Bernsteins Beitrag zur Theorie des Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1977), pp. 144-147, 325, and 354. Below, 327.

To address many of these related concerns and to balance an allegedly incomplete social-democratic picture of Proudhon, Bernstein wrote the article "Proudhon as Politician and Publicist." Bernstein admitted that Proudhon was *petite bourgeois* in the sense that in regard to the problems considered and solutions proposed he could not escape the limitations of that class. Still, in Bernstein's opinion, Proudhon represented a major advance in socialist thinking in France. He attempted to replace an earlier utopianism with an approach recognizing the existing social system. Bernstein wrote,

Until Proudhon, French socialism had in essence been utopian-experimental. It had produced ingenious theories and insights into the laws and tendencies of social development but as socialism had either remained mere theories or led to experiments which in terms of extent and inner character stood in no relationship to the indicated transformation of society. As grand as these experiments were planned, when it came to practical application they shrank down to minute dimensions and thus revealed the contrast between the real stage of development and the speculation which had pushed ahead of it.

Bernstein specifically criticized a French conspiratorial revolutionary communism which dreamed of using confiscations to cause a social revolution like that desired by Babeuf. In the 1848 Revolution this communism had only slogans, and to call the masses to action it even employed nationalistic slogans instead of social revolutionary ones.<sup>17</sup>

Bernstein may have thought that in avoiding slogans and in trying to make socialist demands match economic reality, Proudhon paralleled Marx. Bernstein said that Proudhon did reject utopianism and did wish to see socialism developing out of the present society. But his use of abstractions like "justice" led him to end up merely clarifying his *petite-bourgeois* social order.<sup>18</sup>

Bernstein gave credit to Proudhon for speaking out on behalf of the workers and socialism following the June Days in 1848. Bernstein explained that some of Proudhon's "Philistine" expressions were in

<sup>17</sup>Bernstein, "Proudhon als Politiker und Publizist," *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 609f.

<sup>18</sup>Bernstein, "Proudhon als Politiker und Publizist," p. 611.

reaction to demagogues. The practice of exalting the workers Bernstein found a continuing danger. According to Bernstein, Proudhon eventually doubted the workers' self-emancipation, and he allegedly never understood the class struggle. Proudhon did feel himself a member of the working class, but that of a petite-bourgeois society. His confusing this working class with the proletariat accounted for many of the contradictions in his thought. Again Proudhon did not transcend his society. In Bernstein's analysis, Proudhon admitted as much when he rejected the Hegelian dialectic in favor of a philosophy in which forces balanced one another. It was the philosophy of a petit-bourgeois society.<sup>19</sup>

Bernstein turned to the concern he had expressed to Kautsky, that of finding realistic demands. Bernstein cited Marx's analysis when arguing that unusual conditions might require the working class to accomplish bourgeois tasks—in Germany in 1896 as in France in 1848:

In the *Class Struggles in France* Marx has revealed with great clarity the secret of the contrast between what the French revolutionaries wanted and what they did when he writes: . . . "In France the petite bourgeois does what normally the industrial bourgeois must do; the worker does what normally would be the task of the petite bourgeois." The peculiar historical development of a country, its temperament and traditions, can lead to circumstances which contradict its stage of economic and political development; and the consequence then is always that the classes act differently than the way they should according to their real nature. The incongruity can be found elsewhere too, for example in the changed conditions in today's Germany where, thanks to the wisdom of her politicians, the growth of the social-democratic party has rushed far ahead of the general political development and the party of the proletariat therefore does many things which normally other classes should do.

With sophisticated tricks the demagogue tries to avoid such incongruities between the proclaimed slogans and actual

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 617, 621, and 611. For Bernstein's criticism of Shaw's frustration with the proletariat, compare earlier, 147. On Proudhon and the Hegelian dialectic, see later, 380.

deeds; he lies about his acts, about his enemies, about the whole context.

At least Proudhon was not a demagogue.<sup>20</sup>

Bernstein pointed out that Proudhon had questioned over-reliance on the central government. Bernstein claimed that Proudhon's federalism was much like what Marx desired:

As is already known, Proudhon's anarchism is not at all what is presented under that name today, rather simply a theory of federalism. And if one ignores Proudhon's much-adorned expressions and certain exaggerations which had admittedly become second nature to him, then the federalism he developed will coincide in almost all essential points with the picture Marx sketches in his *The Civil War in France*, Section III, of the form of society which must replace the suppressed state and realize self-government by the society. . . . But that Marx's "anarchism" dates from before 1870 is shown by *The Poverty of Philosophy*, the *Communist Manifesto*, and *The Class Struggles in France*.<sup>21</sup>

Bernstein had utilized Proudhon's thinking to identify what Bernstein took to be Marx's own opposition to the centralized state.

<sup>20</sup>Bernstein, "Proudhon als Politiker und Publizist," p. 612. Compare earlier, 136f. and 154.

<sup>21</sup>Bernstein, "Proudhon als Politiker und Publizist," pp. 620f.

## C. Poland

In a letter to Bernstein on April 30, 1896, Kautsky praised the essay on Saxony: "You have understood the matter much more deeply than I. We need articles like this one more often." He had made a special effort to include Bernstein's text in the current number of *Neue Zeit*, before May Day.<sup>1</sup>

The May Day 1896 issue of *Justice* contained Bax's proposal to ally with native populations to fight colonialism. It also presented an article by a B. A. Jedrzejowski on the history of socialism in Poland. The author argued that fulfilling the socialist program there required national independence, and he quoted a resolution on independence to be submitted to the London Congress of the Second International. The article cited Hyndman, who held the conviction that restraining Russia required an independent Polish state.<sup>2</sup>

To an extent, Hyndman followed Marx and Engels, for they had stressed the need for an independent Poland for international political reasons. The two had remembered Russia's role in the revolutions of 1848. They had believed that while the entente of Russia, Prussia, and Austria continued, liberal and democratic movements in the West could not develop freely. The First International had grown out of meetings called to protest the suppressing of the 1863 Polish revolt. However, Marx and Engels had considered Polish domestic needs, too. The proletariat required a democratic republic with liberal freedoms in order to prepare itself for future rule, and a democratic republic in Poland could only be independent. In 1882 Engels compared the importance of independence for Polish socialists to the importance of ending the Anti-Socialist Laws for German social democrats. In his Foreword to the 1892 Polish translation of the *Communist Manifesto*,<sup>3</sup> Engels called for an independent state to be achieved by the laborers.

<sup>1</sup>KK-EB April 30, 1896.

<sup>2</sup>*Justice*, May 1, 1896, pp. 10f. Earlier, 171f.

<sup>3</sup>Antoni Czubinski, "Le Mouvement Socialiste en Europe et le Problème de la Résurrection d'un État Polonais Indépendant," *Acta Polonica Historica*, XX (1969), 6-10.

Seemingly in reply to *Justice*, in mid-May 1896 Kautsky published one of Rosa Luxemburg's first articles for the German social-democratic press, "New Currents in the Polish Socialist Movement in Germany and Austria." Actually, Kautsky had been discussing the article with her since early March. He had returned the article to her to be shortened, which delayed its appearance until after Jedrzejowski's.<sup>4</sup>

Luxemburg asserted that the "social-patriot" movement demanding Polish independence was very new. She maintained that earlier social democrats had desired an independent Poland for reasons of foreign policy, as a protest and a bulwark against Russia. They had imagined Polish independence resulting from war and diplomacy, not from the everyday struggle of the proletariat. Luxemburg wrote that since 1893 a new movement had arisen demanding independence as an issue of domestic policy. This movement wanted the Polish proletariat to establish a bourgeois class state in much the way one sought universal suffrage in Austria, which meant to her that the issue was no longer one of sympathy for Polish independence but rather one of class interests and concrete possibilities. Here lay Luxemburg's key point: Neither foreign policy nor domestic possibilities now justified Polish social democrats adopting a demand for national independence.<sup>5</sup>

According to Luxemburg, the demand for a Polish class state did not fit the economic-political facts: The proletariat there would receive a greater task than any other working class. It would need to surmount opposition from a Polish bourgeoisie which opposed national unification, to overcome economic relations tying each part of Poland to its respective annexing state, and to defeat three of the strongest

<sup>4</sup>Luxemburg, *Briefe an Karl und Luise Kautsky (1896-1918)*, Luise Kautsky, ed. (Berlin, 1923), pp. 23-27.

<sup>5</sup>Luxemburg, "Neue Strömungen in der polnischen sozialistischen Bewegung in Deutschland und Österreich," *Gesammelte Werke*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, ed. (Berlin, 1970ff.), I/1, 14-19. The article appeared in *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 176-181 and 206-216. This and following references are to the *Gesammelte Werke* edition.

Czubinski, pp. 12f., summarizes Luxemburg's article and compares her opinion to those of Marx and Engels. On the history of the Polish socialist movement and the issue of national independence see J. Peter Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg* (London, 1966), I, 70-75.



governments in Europe--Germany, Austria, and Russia. If the Polish laborers could accomplish all this, she argued, then they could do more than set up a bourgeois class state:

Once the Polish proletariat is capable of achieving the re-establishing of Poland despite the governments of the annexing states and despite the Polish bourgeoisie, then it will surely also be capable of taking up the socialist transformation of society. The amount of power and class consciousness necessary to accomplish the first task is certainly sufficient for accomplishing the second; the second means only cooperating with the economic development, whereas the first means breaking it.

Luxemburg recalled an earlier debate on launching a mass strike in the event of a European war. Socialists had decided then that the proletariat was not powerful enough to halt the functioning of a class state within the existing social order. Luxemburg believed that creating a Polish state would be more difficult.<sup>6</sup>

Poland would later be independent under proletarian rule, Luxemburg thought; yet, the demand for independence did not belong in a social-democratic program.<sup>7</sup> It would appear that for her as for Kautsky and Bernstein, a social-democratic program should include as immediate reforms only those which were compatible with a democratic republic and a capitalist economy and which strengthened the workers. It should avoid speculation about a future proletarian state. Kautsky opposed present government aid directly for the peasants; Bernstein questioned measures intended to stop colonialism; Luxemburg rejected an immediate demand for Polish independence. Their positions could have had the following axiom in common: It was wrong to make demands judged appropriate only to a future stage of historical development.

Luxemburg expressed her concern that the movement for Polish independence might harm the proletarian cause: Adopting the goal

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<sup>6</sup>Luxemburg, "Neue Strömungen," pp. 20-22. Juergen Hentzen, *Nationalismus und Internationalismus bei Rosa Luxemburg* (Bern, 1975), pp. 40-44, also summarizes views of Luxemburg expressed in the article. For Bernstein on the mass strike, see earlier, 180f.

<sup>7</sup>Luxemburg, "Neue Strömungen," p. 36.

would force Polish social democrats to abandon their German or Austrian party to form a new party crossing state frontiers. She feared that emphasis on nationalism would hide the common interests of workers of different nationalities and might cause Polish socialists to follow bourgeois leadership.<sup>8</sup>

Luxemburg decided that the demand for a Polish nation state was utopian and not Marxist, despite the claim of its advocates that they followed the policy of Marx and Engels. According to Luxemburg, Engels himself had later agreed that Russia no longer posed a threat to Europe and that, instead, internal revolution posed a threat to the Czar. In any case, Luxemburg observed, a Polish buffer zone could not stop Russia's diplomats and agents, as witnessed by the example of France.<sup>9</sup> A bourgeois republic in Poland might very well ally with the Czar.

From expressions of Marx and Engels one could derive at most the desirableness of an independent Poland, according to Luxemburg. In her opinion, this was not enough. She explained,

It was none other than precisely Marx and Engels who first taught the working class to make into the drive wheel of all its endeavors not simple desirableness, not mere will to achieve that which is desirable, but rather to take as the criterion for this the actual material conditions of society in its development, which alone can determine whether the desirable is indeed possible and which also make the possible historically necessary.

For Marx and Engels the independence of Poland might result from war and diplomacy, Luxemburg argued. She echoed Kautsky by saying that the results of future wars should not become part of socialist programs. She wrote,

Statements by the founders of scientific socialism thus cannot and must not be interpreted even as hints for the practical everyday program of the Polish proletariat, because they refer only to eventualities in foreign affairs and not to

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 22-30.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 30f.

the domestic class struggle and the results of Poland's course of social development.

Luxemburg warned that the goal of Polish independence was not a principle of social democracy and should not be made into a dogma. To an extent, her reasoning resembled that of Bernstein when he refused the Kladderadatsch of Engels and Bebel as a foundation for policy.<sup>10</sup>

Like Kautsky and Bernstein, Luxemburg located the essence of Marx's teaching in his emphasis on the evolution of material conditions—rather than mere will—as the determining force in history. For her as for them, the true Marxist was one who analyzed this process and constructed a program squarely on such analysis, not one who dreamed up utopias nor even necessarily one who pursued policies which Marx and Engels may have once endorsed. With changing circumstances, a Marxist might need to reconsider earlier views of Marx.

Luxemburg's *Neue Zeit* article sparked heated controversy. For example, the journal *Naprzod* exclaimed on May 14, 1896,

Miss Rosa Luxemburg . . . has published an article in "Neue Zeit" in which she wants to accuse the Polish socialists of a terrible crime. Namely, she wants to prove that we are fervent patriots . . . !

Perhaps of greater concern to Kautsky was Adler's reaction. Adler feared that Luxemburg would create a needless controversy out of the proposed resolution on Poland and raise problems for him with Polish

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 32f. For Kautsky's analogy of predicting future wars, see earlier, 26. For Bernstein on the Kladderadatsch, see earlier, 43 and 182f.

For further discussion of Luxemburg's reconsideration of Marx on the Polish question and of her relationship to Marxism, see Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, I, 37 and 90-92; Hentzen, pp. 38 and 46; and Paul Fröhlich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Johanna Hoornweg, tr. (New York, 1972), pp. 26f., 32, and 49.

socialists. Adler sent Kautsky an article against Luxemburg by the Cracow comrade Samuel Häcker.<sup>11</sup>

Kautsky published Häcker's article; but as important, he added a note explaining why he had published Luxemburg's essay even though not fully agreeing with her.

The *Neue Zeit* is not a journal for propaganda, rather a journal for criticism—even self-criticism. We are well aware that some find fault with our "dogma fanaticism"; in fact we take to be one of our most important tasks presenting for discussion viewpoints which differ from the traditional ones dominant in our party. If this is so seldom the case that we give the impression of being intolerant, it is because we believe that not every special opinion of some "individual" has a right to be heard. When someone wants to battle "orthodoxy" in *Neue Zeit*, we demand that he or she say something new—not discover America for the umpteenth time or develop views and arguments which have long been taken care of for anyone who reads our literature. And of course we must also demand that this "individual" has something to say that holds up. Unfortunately the number of "unorthodox" articles submitted to us which meet these criteria is very small.

In our opinion the article by Miss Luxemburg meets them. Her viewpoint and her arguments are novel and important enough to deserve discussion. The topic itself is very important and rather complicated; and one cannot deny that conditions in the various parts of Poland have changed considerably over the last decades and that thus a revision of several earlier arguments in favor of Polish unification is well in order.<sup>12</sup>

Kautsky had stated his opinion on the revision of Marxist thought. While opposing Luxemburg's stand on Polish independence,

<sup>11</sup>Luxemburg, *Briefe an Kautsky*, p. 30. Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Friedrich Adler, ed. (Vienna, 1954), pp. 207f.

<sup>12</sup>*Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 324.

he could affirm her revising the traditional arguments because her work rested on Marx's method of analysis.

Häcker's reply to Luxemburg included many references to social-democratic leaders who had spoken for Polish independence, spoken at a time when Poland already had a socialist party--Engels in 1892, Georgi Plekhanov in 1896, participants at a London rally on February 1, 1896, including Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling, and Bernstein. Häcker quoted Hyndman's letter to the convener of the demonstration.

"In general I do not care much for national solutions as such. But as far as Poland is concerned, I too believe that the only hope for defending civilized Europe against reactionary Russia lies in re-establishing a strong Poland."

Häcker referred to statements by Bulgarians, an Italian, Bebel, and Liebknecht. Then Häcker cited the section of Bernstein's speech at the February 1 meeting which incorporated Engels's idea that Polish independence might be utopian at present but would certainly follow the victory of German social democracy. Häcker reasoned that this liberation would require cooperation from the Poles, which led him back to Engels's 1892 affirmation that the Polish proletariat would establish an independent Poland.<sup>13</sup>

Häcker also mentioned Bernstein's recent article on Saxony warning against the simplistic use of economic arguments. Häcker believed that economic forces would act for the unification of Poland once Russian capital needed protection from Polish industry. Overlooking Bernstein's equally stern caveat against deferring action on important issues to after some supposedly imminent Kladderadatsch, Häcker claimed that his group had not insisted that they could win independence before the proletariat took power. He said that the entire Polish Socialist Party agreed on independence, that it was not drawing up a new program, that the German and Austrian social-democratic parties did not oppose the Poles organizing separately. He also denied

<sup>13</sup>S.[Samuel] Häcker, "Der Sozialismus in Polen," *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 324-328. *Vorwärts*, February 6, 1896, p. 3, quotes Bernstein's address to the February 1 rally.

that they were neglecting internationalism and discounted bourgeois influence.<sup>14</sup>

When the Poland resolution for London first circulated, Luxemburg had submitted a second article for *Neue Zeit*, titled "Social Patriotism in Poland." Kautsky had returned it. When Häcker's polemic appeared, Luxemburg again sent her essay to Kautsky, enclosing a separate reply to Häcker. She gave Kautsky permission to cut or combine sections as he deemed best.<sup>15</sup>

Luxemburg rejected Häcker's claim that the "social patriots" had not insisted that they could achieve Polish independence before the proletarian revolution. She wrote,

For the re-establishment of Poland as a class state only after "the great Kladderadatsch" is crazy while after it the liberation of Poland as a nation is a matter of course and thus cannot form a special postulate for agitation today.

More to the point, since the "social patriots" had described their new Polish republic as a class state with bourgeois institutions, she reasoned, they clearly considered independence possible before the proletariat took power.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Häcker, "Der Sozialismus in Polen," 328-332. Earlier, 182f.

<sup>15</sup>Letters of Luxemburg to Kautsky on May 24, 1896, and in June 1896 in Luxemburg, *Briefe an Kautsky*, pp. 28-34.

<sup>16</sup>Luxemburg, "Der Sozialpatriotismus in Polen," *Gesammelte Werke*, I/1, 37f. The article was published first in *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 459-470. This and other references are to the *Gesammelte Werke* edition.

I infer that Luxemburg doubted that the Zusammenbruch was imminent (that is, would occur before the workers took power) from her developed theory of imperialism--that capitalism could theoretically expand to the limit of its potential but would be overthrown by the proletariat earlier. See above, 40.

On Luxemburg's use of the Zusammenbruch idea in her 1898 critique of Bernstein, see Rudolf Walther, ". . . aber nach der Sündflut kommen wir und nur wir." "Zusammenbruchstheorie", *Marxismus und*



From Häcker's denial that this possibility was what his group proclaimed, one might infer that they thought that the Polish laborers could establish an independent state before the proletarian revolution but should deliberately wait to do so until after it. This inference would violate Bernstein's key point that social democrats should not consign to the period after the revolution those reforms which were compatible with a democratic republic and capitalist economy and which aided the workers' cause. In contrast to Häcker, Luxemburg doubted that Polish independence could be won before the proletariat took control. After the revolution Poland would of course be free. In neither case did the demand for independence belong in a socialist program.

Luxemburg quoted the Poland resolution for London before attacking both its provisions and the possible result of its adoption.

"In consideration that the subjugation of one nation by another can only be in the interest of capitalists and despots while in contrast it is equally destructive for the laboring people, as much for those of the oppressed as those of the oppressing nation, and especially that the Russian Czarist regime, which gains its inner strength and outer importance from the subjugation and division of Poland, constitutes a lasting danger to the development of the international workers' movement, the Congress declares: that the independence of Poland is a necessary political demand as much for the whole international workers' movement as for the Polish proletariat."

Luxemburg found it naive to propose abolishing something caused by the essence of capitalism (in this instance, the subjugation of Poland) while remaining within that system. Luxemburg believed that the Czar derived his power not from the division of Poland but rather from Russian domestic economic and social conditions, from Russia's role in the Eastern Question and in Asia, and from the diplomatic repercussions of the German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. She worried that adopting the resolution would encourage nationalistic tendencies among Polish social democrats, that it would contradict earlier decisions against the proposal for a mass strike in event of war, and that it would raise the national issue for Ireland, Bohemia, and

*politisches Defizit in der SPD 1890-1914* (Frankfurt/M., 1981), pp. 162f.

Alsace-Lorraine. Much had changed since 1848, Luxemburg observed: The threat was no longer Russian bayonets but Russian diplomacy; one should promote the unity of proletarian forces within the Russian Empire in opposing the Czar.<sup>17</sup>

Luxemburg challenged the whole approach of initially assigning the Polish national movements a role in foreign affairs and then appraising their internal circumstances. For her, the correct approach first analyzed how social conditions determined the character of the national movements and hence their implications for international relations. It was not a question of will but of facing the facts of Poland's necessary social and economic evolution determining which political goals were feasible. Luxemburg attempted to show how Polish industry in the Russian section was tied into the Russian economy. She claimed that no non-proletarian class had both the desire and the strength to realize national independence. As for the Polish workers, she warned against drawing a false parallel with the West:

When the proletariat in Western Europe adopts the democratic rallying cry betrayed by the bourgeoisie, there is good reason for this. Proletariat and bourgeoisie, although hostile siblings, are nonetheless children of the same social formation—the capitalist. It carries within itself a certain number of democratic political tendencies which it tries to give birth to. At first the bourgeoisie appears as the bearer of these tendencies . . . . However, once class conflicts are mature enough to force the proletariat onto the political stage, the bourgeoisie drops one democratic ideal after another. When the proletariat picks up these ideals at this point, it appears merely as the political heir to the bourgeoisie, the bearer of the tendencies of the same capitalist period, which is its historical role anyway. In Poland, as we have seen, proletariat and bourgeoisie belong to a formation which sprang up already on the grave of the national struggles. Actually the independence of Poland was not betrayed by the bourgeoisie, for this was never its ideal. It was the ideal of the pre-capitalist, aristocratic, agricultural period.

<sup>17</sup>Luxemburg, "Der Sozialpatriotismus in Polen," pp. 39-42.

According to Luxemburg, the proletariat must base its actions on the capitalist system, but this tied Poland to Russia.<sup>18</sup>

As had Bernstein, Luxemburg here implied that the proletariat was the heir of the bourgeoisie and was destined to realize many of its democratic goals. Like Bernstein, she realized that a Marxist analysis might reach different conclusions when applied to different situations—for example, to different countries or to the same nation at different times.<sup>19</sup>

Liebknecht shared Hyndman's desire for an independent Poland to stop Russia. So he supported a leader of the Polish Socialist Party answering Luxemburg. The article by Witold Jadko-Narkiewicz appeared anonymously in *Vorwärts* on July 15, 16, and 17, 1896. The author conceded that before 1892 Polish social democrats did not demand independence as an immediate goal, but because they were fighting a nationalistic bourgeoisie. They assumed that independence would follow the revolution. In addition, Narkiewicz said, the People's Will (Narodnaya Volya) movement impressed the early socialists in the part of Poland under Russia. When this movement declined and the Polish socialists suffered greater persecution from the Russian government, they came to advocate national independence. Narkiewicz imagined that even a constitutional Russia might oppress the Poles; he was more certain that a bourgeois Russia would do so. Narkiewicz then attempted what for him was a *reductio ad absurdum*: If Luxemburg opposed Polish independence because it hurt the interests of the bourgeois, then should socialists not back measures serving bourgeois interests—like tariffs, perhaps, or like the colonial policy of France regarding Southeast Asia? He might have mentioned Great Britain and South Africa, but did not. Narkiewicz offered counter-examples to Luxemburg's economic arguments. Supposedly, those Polish political parties acquiescing in the status quo were weakest. He implied that the social-democratic heritage demanded Polish independence just as Marx and Engels endorsed the unification of Germany. According to Narkiewicz, even Luxemburg admitted that Russia was weak. In regard to Germany and Austria, the demand for Polish independence might now be utopian, but no more so than the goal of equal suffrage in Prussia. Finally, Narkiewicz gave reasons for

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 42-50.

<sup>19</sup>Compare earlier, 136-138.

separate Polish social-democratic organizations in Germany, Austria, and Russia; one reason was that of language.<sup>20</sup>

Luxemburg answered sharply. She dismissed the suggestion that social democrats would support colonialism. Narkiewicz had confused the general capitalist social-economic evolution with the special interests of the bourgeoisie, she said. The two differed greatly, the proletariat basing itself on the former only. Within weeks, Luxemburg would argue that social democrats should favor certain movements for national independence which furthered social and economic advance strengthening the proletariat.<sup>21</sup>

Luxemburg accused Narkiewicz of refusing to face historical necessity, concocting a program to fit his own imagination instead. Yes, she had said that revolution threatened the Czar; but even after a revolution, the Russian state would remain. The "social-patriot" demand for Polish independence contradicted much of the social-democratic program for Germany and Austria, she explained; for the desired democratic reforms in these countries would lead to their becoming stronger, not to their breaking up. As for Russia, one could not seek democratic reforms within a state and also advocate seceding from it. Allegedly, the "social patriots" divided the proletarian forces in Russia and weakened the movement against the Czar. Luxemburg rejected the proposition that those Polish political parties condoning the status quo were weaker than those advocating independence. After accounting for several suggested exceptions to her economic arguments, Luxemburg defended her methodology,

Thus "our" materialist conception of history seems not to be in quite as bad a condition as the venerable comrade believes:  
Over and over again it is the material interests which shape

<sup>20</sup>Anonymous [Witold Jadko-Narkiewicz], "Zur Taktik der polnischen Sozialdemokratie," *Vorwärts*, July 15, 1896, p. 9; July 16, p. 5; and July 17, p. 9. That Liebknecht supported the article's publication is stated in Luxemburg, *Briefe an Leon Jogiches*, Introduction by Feliks Tych (Frankfurt/M., 1971), p. 67 note 9.

<sup>21</sup>Luxemburg, "Zur Taktik der polnischen Sozialdemokratie," *Gesammelte Werke*, I/1, 52f.; the article appeared in *Vorwärts*, July 25, 1896, p. 9. This and the later reference are to the *Gesammelte Werke* edition. See below, 221f.

and explain the political physiognomy of the different classes.<sup>22</sup>

As his note to Häcker's article suggested, Kautsky was impressed by Luxemburg, though he disagreed with her on Polish independence. Since he was busy writing on agriculture and on cooperatives, he asked Bernstein to prepare an article, only to discover that his friend was less opposed to Luxemburg. It was in the opening of her first article that she had challenged Liebknecht and Hyndman's belief in an independent Poland arresting the Russian threat. Bernstein told Kautsky that he particularly liked this opening but that Luxemburg had gone too far in her anti-nationalism. In the 1880's Engels had explained to Bernstein that the cause of Polish independence was a valid one; Engels did not fear cooperation with the bourgeois on this issue. Later Bernstein wrote Kautsky that Luxemburg was wrong, that in Poland there were more classes than merely capitalists and workers. Apparently, Bernstein thought that these others could support the national cause. Kautsky finally composed his own reply to Luxemburg, but he embodied Bernstein's observations.<sup>23</sup>

In the first installment of his article "Finis Poloniae?" Kautsky completely assented to Luxemburg on the foreign policy dimension of the Polish question: It was wrong to seek an independent state merely for an ally against Russia. The First International had done so, but the Second International could not since many things had changed. Kautsky remarked that the lesser nobility of Poland had once served as revolutionary leaders throughout the West, providing the proletariat and bourgeoisie with military training. However, much as Engels had argued in his 1895 Introduction but going beyond it, Kautsky maintained that the armed uprising was out-of-date—replaced by the

<sup>22</sup>Luxemburg, "Zur Taktik der polnischen Sozialdemokratie," pp. 53-56.

<sup>23</sup>KK-EB June 2, 1896; EB-KK June 6, 1896. EB-KK June 29, 1896. Hans Mommsen, "Nationalismus und nationale Frage im Denken Eduard Bernsteins," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, p. 136.

On Kautsky's views on Polish independence around 1880, see Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854-1938. Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh, 1978), p. 137.

suffrage, the right to coalition and assembly, and freedom of the press. He believed that many nobles remaining in Poland had become conservative, serving their annexing government; that revolution threatened the Czar; and that now a revolution in Western Europe would have repercussions keeping the Czar occupied at home. Russian expansion in the guise of Pan Slavism had been replaced by a desire for peace in the face of national independence movements throughout the Near East, Kautsky reported. Czar and Sultan were now allied. Kautsky continued,

Poland does not remain untouched by the changed circumstance. The decline of Pan Slavism and the rise of a strong revolutionary movement in Russia have the result that speaking up for the re-establishing of Poland and speaking up for the integrity of Turkey cease to form urgent necessities for West European democracy. Each of these demands, the one like the other, is losing the great international significance they possessed—for democrats in general so also for the revolutionary proletariat in Europe; and it would be totally wrong to want to revive the old schema (Schablone) and expect the new International to assume on the Poland question exactly the position which the first International held.

If Miss Luxemburg had wished to prove no more than this, we would fully agree with her.<sup>24</sup>

However, Kautsky disagreed with Luxemburg concerning Polish independence as a domestic issue. He listed her three groups of reasons for rejecting the demand and then attacked each of them.<sup>25</sup>

First, to provide direction a social-democratic program could contain demands which were currently impossible. Kautsky wrote,

Our practical demands, be they "postulates" explicitly formulated in a program or ones quietly accepted, are measured not by whether they are obtainable under the existing power relationships but rather by whether they are compatible with the existing social order and whether their

<sup>24</sup>Kautsky, "Finis Poloniae?" *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 484-491.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 511.



execution lends itself to making easier and to promoting the class struggle of the proletariat and to smoothing the way to its political rule.

Kautsky observed that the SPD demanded the popular election of government commissions, though in the present political situation the goal was "utopian" too. It was similar with the desire for a republic. Kautsky definitely thought an independent Poland possible before the proletariat took political power.<sup>26</sup>

Second, Luxemburg had allegedly overlooked changing economic relationships in central Europe. Kautsky said that as industry grew in Poland and in Russia, capitalists in Russia would turn more and more to the Czar for help against those in Poland. The resulting discrimination would encourage Polish bourgeois to desire national independence, while at the same time the German and Austrian sections of Poland offered an alternative market.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps it was from his study of the agrarian question that Kautsky took the idea that small-scale producers might not decline quickly in number. Luxemburg wrongly ignored the petite bourgeoisie as a political force, Kautsky judged.

The competition of the large capitalist enterprises ruins the small ones, but does not eliminate them equally fast. Its effect becomes apparent more in changing the character of the small enterprises. For example, it does not eliminate the craftsman everywhere. More often it changes him into a repairman, dealer in factory goods, or sweater. Finally the proletariat itself supplies an ever-increasing soil for a numerous parasitic petite bourgeoisie—for small dealers, innkeepers, and such.

The petite bourgeois would demand satisfactory economic conditions; and when refused, they would grow restless, Kautsky feared. They could become a source of support for clericalism, for anti-Semitism,

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 513f. and 520. Massimo Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution 1880-1938*, Jon Rothschild, tr. (New York, 1979), pp. 43f. Compare KK-EB June 2, 1896.

<sup>27</sup>Kautsky, "Finis Poloniae?" pp. 515f. Compare KK-EB June 2, 1896.

and in certain areas for nationalism. And they were not the only group desiring national independence, Kautsky thought. Luxemburg herself had described how the intellectuals suffered under Russian domination. Competition from Russian grain harmed the peasants, who no longer looked to the Czar out of opposition to the nationalistic Polish nobility.<sup>28</sup>

From the belief that Russia faced the prospect of revolution, Kautsky deduced that Polish independence might be possible before the proletariat took power. The exact nature of the new state could not be foreseen, Kautsky conceded.

But here it is also not at all a matter of this, rather of proving that already within the framework of today's society, before long, Polish independence can become a question of very practical politics and that accordingly the Polish proletariat has every reason to comment on it and not to avoid it by referring to the great Kladderadatsch which supposedly will straighten everything out on its own.<sup>29</sup>

With this Kautsky advanced an issue Luxemburg would leave to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat into the time before the workers had conquered power, and he wanted social democracy to take a stand on the issue. Bernstein had done much the same when in 1893 he challenged the SPD to address the suffrage in Prussia. The insistence that social democrats act immediately for certain types of change was expressed already in the Erfurt Program Part Two.

Kautsky had addressed Bernstein's concern that some important issues should not be left to the period after the proletariat had seized power. Similarly, Kautsky's criticism that Luxemburg had neglected various classes which might still support independence corresponded well with Bernstein's allegation that she had considered only capitalists and workers. Kautsky remarked that those "anti-nationalist Polish social democrats who prefer the danger of helping the Czar to the danger of advancing petite-bourgeois democracy" reminded him of those English social democrats who mistakenly voted for the Tories

<sup>28</sup>Kautsky, "Finis Poloniae?" pp. 516-519. See also Czubinski, p. 15. Earlier, 91-93.

<sup>29</sup>Kautsky, "Finis Poloniae?" pp. 519f. See also Czubinski, p. 16.

rather than risk being corrupted by cooperation with the Radicals. Kautsky saw that various organizational or tactical problems could arise for Polish social democracy, Luxemburg's third group of reasons. But he did not derive from these an argument against Polish independence. He believed that she had overlooked the importance of language.<sup>30</sup>

In Kautsky's opinion, the Second International should speak out on the issue of Polish independence since the Polish proletariat was hindered in doing so. He disliked the resolution submitted in favor of independence because it failed to connect national unity to the class struggle and because he doubted that the Czar still drew much power from the subjugation of Poland. Nonetheless, Kautsky was certain that the Second International should declare itself in favor of Polish independence.<sup>31</sup>

On July 17, 1896, Bernstein wrote Kautsky praising his article on Poland. "It is completely in the spirit of Marxism even though, or especially since, it goes against the old Marxist position on the Poland question." Bernstein could admire the thinking of both Kautsky and Luxemburg, though they reached different conclusions about Poland, because of their mutual emphasis on the social-economic situation.<sup>32</sup> Here the question for Bernstein was the correct use of Marx: as method or as model. On this issue, Bernstein, Kautsky, and Luxemburg agreed on employing Marxism as a method of analysis seeking to relate political and other cultural events to evolving material conditions, even when the approach meant reaching conclusions different from those of Marx. They also agreed on repudiating the interpretation of Marxism as a schema (Schablone) of historical

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<sup>30</sup>Kautsky, "Finis Poloniae?" pp. 520-523.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 523-525. Summary and commentary on the article are also found in Feliks Tych, "Karl Kautsky und die polnische Frage," Jürgen Hensel, tr., in *Marxismus und Demokratie. Karl Kautskys Bedeutung in der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung*, Jürgen Rojahn, Till Schelz-Brandenburg, and Hans-Josef Steinberg, eds. (Frankfurt/M. and New York, 1992), pp. 276-278.

<sup>32</sup>EB-KK July 17, 1896. Further discussion of Luxemburg, Kautsky, and Poland is in Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, I, 94-103.

development or a prescription of set policies—the interpretation held by Liebknecht and Hyndman.

## D. London

Social-democratic leaders from around the world attended the Congress of the Second International meeting in London from July 27 to August 1, 1896. Beyond providing opportunity for personal contact, the London Congress accomplished little; it failed to settle the key issues that had confronted social democracy since the death of Engels one year before. The agrarian commission, on which Kautsky represented the Austrian party, wanted socialization and rational cultivation of land but decided that conditions varied too widely to make specific recommendations, other than to organize the rural proletariat. The Congress passed a declaration that the expansion of capitalism into the colonies benefited only the capitalists. In place of the Poland resolution from the Polish Socialist Party, the Congress approved a general expression of sympathy for oppressed peoples, with a reference to the triumph of socialism. The Congress did advocate workers forming political parties independent of the bourgeoisie, in a resolution which both the Fabians and some British trade-union leaders opposed. Bebel argued that the SPD had grown strong in opposition to bourgeois parties and that the British proletariat could accomplish the same. Once it was organized and independent, it would soon dominate state and society. Preceding and also symbolizing the atmosphere of failure in London were the parade and mass demonstration in Hyde Park intended to open the Congress. Instead of representing splendidly the strength and international solidarity of the labor movement, they suffered a half-hour deluge.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 210. The work of the agrarian commission was reported in *Justice*, July 31, 1896, p. 4. See also Hans Georg Lehmann, *Die Agrarfrage in der Theorie und Praxis der deutschen und internationalen Sozialdemokratie* (Tübingen, 1971), pp. 224f. *Vorwärts*, July 31, p. 2; *Vorwärts*, August 1, 1896, p. 3.

The Congress's stand on national independence appeared in *Justice*, July 31, p. 4. Czubinski, p. 18; Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, II, 98f. And see below, 230.

The statement on colonialism was presented in *Justice*, July 31, p. 4, and in *Vorwärts*, August 1, p. 4. For the resolution on independent labor parties see *Justice*, July 31, pp. 2 and 4; or *Vorwärts*, August 1, p. 4.

A summary of the reports is found in G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought* (London, 1953-56), III, 29-33.

In part the Congress's failure was anticipated. Bebel wrote Adler in late June: "I have very few hopes for the Congress; people will make a lot of noise, but little will come out of it. I am already satisfied if its decisions do not constitute a step backwards."<sup>2</sup> However, in addition the Congress was disrupted for two days by anarchists and was forced to spend a third day deciding on delegations.

Before the Congress, *Vorwärts* had claimed that most social democrats stood united against the anarchists. They would simply be excluded. The newspaper avowed, "The London Congress will talk neither with the anarchists nor about anarchism. . . . And the motion to admit or not to admit can be settled very quickly." *Justice* similarly asserted that anarchists had no business at a social-democratic assembly. Bernstein also thought that they should be barred; but in an unsigned article in *Vorwärts*, he urged that reasons be given to show the British public that social democrats were not dogmatic. Socialists should not dismiss public opinion as only the opinion of the enemy. He wrote,

No matter how strong the political or class conflict, it does not occupy all the life of our time; it does not dominate all the thinking and feeling of people. There are still points on which we stand on common ground with at least a major part of the opposition.

Bernstein recommended that one look at the tasks of the London meeting and the necessary basis of discussion there, expressed in the resolution of the 1893 Zurich Congress. Only those willing to act through legislative means could profitably contribute. To Bernstein, the Zurich resolution was not dogmatic; rather, the anarchists were. For the Zurich resolution did not restrict the proletariat to governmental means, while the anarchists prohibited political participation. Bernstein repeated his concern that laborers might rely too much on the state:

No one would object more energetically than the writer of this article to wanting to refer the workers exclusively to the state, to help from above. By all means I do not want to see

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The rain disturbing the opening procession and speeches was described in *Vorwärts*, July 29, pp. 2f.

<sup>2</sup>Bebel to Adler June 28, 1896, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 209.



a race of state dependents growing up. But there is an enormous difference between observing limits in making demands on the state and forbidding it entirely.<sup>3</sup>

Even before their admission could be debated on Monday, July 27, the first day of the Congress, anarchists on the floor and others in the visitors' gallery disrupted the meeting, forcing adjournment. The *Vossische Zeitung* printed in German the London *Sun*'s lurid depiction of the confusion:

The wild scenes which followed simply defy description. These social apostles, who would lead the nations on the path of peace and unite all humanity in brotherly love, growled and yelled at one another, jumped on the chairs, swung their walking sticks like crazy, and finally began a general brawl.

Perhaps the *Sun* exaggerated, but even *Justice* passed on the following incident:

One individual whose voice was lost in the universal din, but whose vigorous gesticulations attracted attention, was about to be removed forcibly from the gallery as an obstreperous Anarchist when he was suddenly recognized as a friendly neighbor. He was Mr. Newman, the manager of the hall, who was endeavoring to say that he should have the Congress expelled by the police if order was not restored.<sup>4</sup>

On Tuesday the Congress proceeded to debate the admission of anarchists. Keir Hardie urged tolerance; Jaurès praised political action since even trade-union organization required protective legislation. Tom Mann spoke for including the anarchists; Hyndman espoused the Zurich resolution banning them. *Vorwärts* described Hyndman as "the intellectual leader of the Social Democratic Federation, that organization which in tactic and principles more-or-less corresponds to

<sup>3</sup>*Vorwärts*, July 19, 1896, pp. 1f.; *Justice*, July 30, p. 1. Anonymous [Bernstein], "Der Londoner Kongreß und die Anarchisten," *Vorwärts*, July 24, p. 2. See earlier, 185f.

<sup>4</sup>LHAP 9419, Bl. 88; *Justice*, July 29, 1896, p. 4.

German social democracy." The Dutch leader Nieuwenhuis opposed dogma in favor of freedom of opinion. The Congress represented trade unions which sometimes sent anarchist delegates. The Zurich resolution was upheld by a vote of eleven nations to two with one abstaining. However, the verdict still did not end the anarchist controversy, for the French section had divided into a majority for admission and a minority threatening to walk out if it were not acknowledged as a separate group. Finally, with Hyndman presiding on Wednesday, the Congress voted to recognize two French delegations.<sup>5</sup>

While the anarchist question preoccupied the plenary sessions, business progressed in the Congress's committees. Sidney Webb defended a resolution calling on the state "to provide a complete system of education, under democratic public control, extending from the Kindergarten to the University . . . the whole made genuinely accessible to every citizen by freedom from fees and by scholarships covering maintenance." Such education would be mandatory to age 16. Keir Hardie succeeded in amending the resolution to suggest that governments must maintain all pupils--an idea rejected by Webb as impracticable and by Zetkin. The *Vossische Zeitung* related, "She emphasized especially that it is totally impossible to make all young people to the age of 21, or even to 24, into state pensioners, . . ." In his later review of the Congress, Bernstein seconded Zetkin by again iterating his concern about relying too much on the state:

We view as a regrettable decision the passing of the amendment to the resolution on education, which asks for all children not only free education but also free support up to the age of 21. We see in the demand in part a regression into utopianism, in part a dangerous tendency to nurture a spirit of pretorianism within the proletariat. For communist society it would be superfluous; for the bourgeois society in which we find ourselves and to which it is addressed, it amounts to ruining the workers, to teaching them to grow used to being fed from the manger of the state. Here is one point where

<sup>5</sup>*Justice*, July 29, 1896, p. 2; July 30, p. 1; July 31, p. 1. *Vorwärts*, July 29, 1896, p. 3; July 30, p. 2; July 31, p. 2; August 1, 1896, p. 3. The quotation describing Hyndman and the SDF is from *Vorwärts*, July 30, p. 2. The debate is summarized in G. D. H. Cole, III, 28f.

anarchist criticism, if it ever goes beyond generalities, would be to a large degree in order.

Here were two earlier concerns of Bernstein: In a manner typical of state socialism, Keir Hardie's amendment seemed to seek in present bourgeois society a goal appropriate only to the future; and the practice might bring the laborers to expect too much of a worker government, in place of their own efforts. At the Congress, the German delegation voted against the resolution on education as amended, but it passed nonetheless.<sup>6</sup>

At the final plenary session the German delegate Hermann Molkenbuhr reported for the committee on the economy and industry. They had little new to recommend, he began, both because of the excellent demands originally made in 1889 and because of the difficulty in arriving at policies applicable to all countries. For example, the Fabians wished nationalization of tobacco, alcohol, and food manufacture and trade; but the Germans remembered fighting such proposals when introduced to shore up the monarchy. However, the Congress did approve a resolution which favored the nationalization of selected means of production; which encouraged workers to join trade unions as well as to form labor parties; and which called for May Day demonstrations. Anticipating the Kladderadatsch, one passage read,

The economic and industrial development is going on with such rapidity that a crisis may occur within a relatively short time. The Congress, therefore, impresses upon the proletariat of all countries the imperative necessity for learning, as class-conscious citizens, how to administer the business of their respective countries for the common good.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>*Justice*, August 1, 1896, pp. 2f. On p. 1 *Justice* celebrated Webb's defeat at the Congress. This suggests that Bernstein's opposition to over-reliance on the state may have been reinforced by his aversion to the SDF, which favored Keir Hardie's amendment. LHAP 9419, Bl. 96. Bernstein, "Kritisches zum Internationalen Londoner Sozialisten- und Gewerkschafts-Kongreß," *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 651. See earlier, 209f. *Vorwärts*, August 4, 1896, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup>*Justice*, August 8, 1896, p. 6; *Vorwärts*, August 4, 1896, pp. 9f. And see below, 398.

Both *Vorwärts* and *Justice* attempted to present a favorable picture of the Congress; but Bernstein countered them point by point. Where the two newspapers maintained that valuable work was accomplished in the committees, Bernstein deemed this activity insufficient; to him a worthwhile Congress needed good reports and, if possible, debates. Where *Justice* and *Vorwärts* favored Hyndman's speech against the anarchists, Bernstein complained that the SDF leader lacked sufficient knowledge of the Zurich resolution. Where *Justice* shared the desire that future congresses include only social-democratic parties, Bernstein mentioned the almost unanimous rejection of the SDF proposal suggesting this. He wanted the trade unions too.

Intimate contact with the great workers' movement is of much greater importance for social democracy than all formal advantages which the uniformity of such a party congress would offer. Better to put up with all the unevenness and friction of the past congresses and better, if this were the only alternative, to open the door to the anarchists again, than to lose the contact. For only the close tie to the main body of workers struggling for progress protects social democracy from ossification, from decaying into sectarianism.<sup>8</sup>

For Bernstein as for Marx, Engels, and Kautsky, the proletariat remained vitally important to the socialist movement.

Where those at *Vorwärts* or *Justice* might celebrate the resolution demanding labor parties "independent of" and "apart from" the bourgeoisie, Bernstein sought to explain why the British trade unions would not comply. Though the Congress did not intend to forbid workers' parties from entering tactical alliances with others, the English would interpret the resolution this way, Bernstein feared. He reported that trade-union leaders had entered Parliament with Liberal help and then had fought for the workers, even against the Liberal Party. As an illustration, Bernstein gave J. H. Wilson who was elected

<sup>8</sup>Bernstein, "Kritisches zum Internationalen Kongreß," pp. 646-652. *Justice*, August 8, 1896, p. 4; July 29, 1896, p. 2; July 30, p. 1. *Vorwärts*, August 8, 1896, pp. 2f. Compare earlier, 147f.

*Justice*, August 15, p. 4, printed a statement from Liebknecht praising the Congress. This action illustrates cooperation between the SPD leader and the SDF. Compare earlier, 163.



in 1892 against both Liberal and Conservative opposition but in 1895 was re-elected only through an arrangement with the Liberals.

He is in no way an opponent of independent labor candidates, but under the present conditions he could only go against a resolution which demands proceeding not only "independent of" but also "apart from" all bourgeois parties. The Englishman understands these things very concretely. He knows no abstract social democracy; he knows the Social Democratic Federation and its tactics; and this is what he means when he comments on social democracy. In the same way the concept of an independent political workers' party has now been determined by the tactics of the Independent Labour Party. One has to know this and take it into account if one wants to judge correctly the behavior of people like the union leaders D. Hennessey and W. Steadmann.

An independent socialist workers' party will develop in the English Parliament only when the socialists have developed a reasonable political tactic. This, however, can be achieved not through vague resolutions but through careful consideration of the given conditions.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, where *Justice* and *Vorwärts* praised the SDF's role at the Congress, Bernstein regretted the harm which he thought the party had done. *Vorwärts* saw the SDF becoming the premier social-democratic party in England and predicted that the formation of one united party would follow. This union would be the most important outcome of the Congress. Again *Vorwärts* likened the SDF's principles to those of German social democracy. Bernstein believed that the British trade unions were upset because they had been denied seats on select committees, an oversight he attributed to rivalry between the SDF and ILP. He expected that because of this tactlessness the 1896 Edinburgh TUC would repeal the Norwich resolution calling for nationalization of the means of production and exchange.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Bernstein, "Kritisches zum Internationalen Kongreß," pp. 650f. *Vorwärts*, August 8, 1896, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>*Justice*, August 22, 1896, p. 6. *Vorwärts*, August 8, 1896, p. 2; and August 13, p. 2. Anonymous [Bernstein], "Aus England," *Vorwärts*, August 26, p. 1. Compare *Vorwärts*, September 13, p. 9.

## E. Turkey

Throughout the nineteenth century, subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire rebelled. The 1890's were marked by unrest and violence in Armenia, in Macedonia, and on Crete. A Cretan insurgence in May 1896 and an Armenian disruption in Constantinople that August, both followed by reprisals, bolstered intervention by the European Powers. There was suspicion of Czarist influence, fear of Russian gains in the eastern Mediterranean region, and concern about a general European war.<sup>1</sup> *Vorwärts* and *Justice* published compatible views of the crisis. Allegedly, Czarist agents and money were the real cause of the turmoil. Russia aimed to weaken the Ottoman Empire in order to expand in the Near East, so it was necessary to preserve Turkey (die Türkei) as a bulwark against this expansion. Though not above reproach, Ottoman rule was tolerable; and the government's faults could be corrected if Russia would allow reform to occur. According to *Vorwärts* and *Justice*, reports of earlier alleged atrocities were exaggerated; in any case, the Czar was more oppressive than the Sultan; and the subject peoples preferred the Turks. *Justice* alleged that some among those Englishmen wanting Great Britain to intervene had been bribed and that others were motivated by religious prejudice or by a desire to distract attention from problems in the British Empire or at home. *Vorwärts* presented the policy of upholding the Ottoman Empire against Russia as the authentic Marxist one. It cited Marx's dislike for the Czarist regime and asked for publication of his writings on the Eastern Question.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>My purpose in summarizing the views of various social democrats on the Eastern Question in the mid-1890's is solely that of trying to describe the thought of Kautsky and Bernstein at the time. I am not seeking to portray events in the Ottoman Empire, a subject on which I am not qualified to speak. Just as I cannot comment on whether the opinions of Kautsky or Bernstein or their contemporaries were accurate, I cannot judge whether the policies they advocated were sound.

<sup>2</sup>*Vorwärts*, January 31, 1896, pp. 2f.; February 4, p. 2; February 15, p. 3; February 19, p. 3; February 29, p. 3; May 27, 1896, p. 2; July 2, 1896, p. 2; July 3, pp. 2f.; July 5, p. 2; July 7, p. 2; July 11, pp. 1f.; August 11, 1896, p. 2; August 29, p. 3; August 30, p. 3; September 3, 1896, p. 2; September 6, pp. 2f.; September 9, 1896, p. 2; September



In late September 1896 Bernstein challenged the interpretation of the Eastern Question propounded by *Justice* and *Vorwärts*. On September 29 *Vorwärts* carried his unsigned article describing the English protest movement against the Sultan. Much of the agitation was exaggerated, Bernstein admitted; but for him two facts remained: (a) The Sultan's government was archaic and incapable of reform, which justified European intervention; and Great Britain's intervention would be in the interest of the Sultan's subjects. (b) The agitation was not self-interested. Nor was it a matter of opposing the Mohammedan religion; rather, public attacks on the religion had to do with it as a support for certain social and political institutions. Bernstein conceded that to a degree the protest movement was in favor of Russia. However, the English had little choice but to help Russia if they wished to assist the Armenians, he believed; there was little regard for the Czar's system of government. People asked how one could condemn Britain for cooperating with Russia if Germany did so. They thought that Germany and Austria also had an interest in checking Russian expansion and that failing to solve the crisis would only serve Russia in the future. Many English democrats were thinking this way, Bernstein claimed.

From their perspective it is a freedom and reform movement, in the same way England helped the Greeks, Italians, and Bulgarians, etc. achieve their national independence. It is the curse of German history that the German people have been able to join almost none of these movements with undivided sympathy.

Bernstein then criticized the basic premise of *Justice* and *Vorwärts*:

13, pp. 1f.; September 17, p. 2; September 22, p. 2; September 26, p. 3; October 3, 1896, p. 2.

*Justice*, November 23, 1895, p. 4; February 15, 1896, p. 4; June 20, 1896, p. 6; September 19, 1896, pp. 1 and 4; September 22, p. 1; September 26, p. 4; October 3, 1896, p. 4.

On Liebknecht's attitude toward Turkey see William George Vettes, "The German Social Democrats and the Eastern Question, 1848-1900," *The American Slavic and East European Review*, XVII (February 1958), 92-94.

Sometimes socialists pointed out that their opposition to the Czar or Sultan was directed not against the person but against the form of government. For example, *Justice*, September 26, 1896, p. 1.

No doubt agents of the Czar are operating throughout the Orient. But this is certainly no reason to side with a Sultan who, merely in order to avoid reforms, hides behind the skirt of the Czar. Turkey has ceased to be a dam against Russian intrigues; in its present form it remains only a breeding ground for them.<sup>3</sup>

*Vorwärts* editors prefaced Bernstein's report with a remark that they could not agree with it. Perhaps his unsigned article dated October 2, 1896, pleased them even less. Bernstein reported that most English socialists opposed the agitation against the Ottoman Empire, both because it was exaggerated and because they thought it distracted from problems elsewhere. But a recent meeting called by the SDF had passed a resolution which expressed sympathy for the Armenians and condemned the Powers for allowing the situation in the Near East to reach this extreme. Bernstein declared that hardly anyone in England liked the status quo anymore, that even many Conservatives rejected the old policy of maintaining the Ottoman Empire as a defense against Russia. According to Bernstein, British leaders were considering a settlement with Russia, one recognizing Russia as the protector of Christians in the Ottoman Empire and acknowledging Russian power on the Bosphorus. Supposedly, many Englishmen doubted that their country would have the most to lose in this arrangement. Great Britain would sacrifice no vital interest of the Empire and could depend on its navy; the real losers would be Russia's neighbors. Bernstein granted that the Armenians had little to gain by exchanging the Sultan for the Czar. But they would be happy with the trade, Bernstein thought; for then they would at least have security of life and property. *Vorwärts* appended a note replying that it could not imagine that the British government was ready to sacrifice Turkey to Russia, that the Christians

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous [Bernstein], "Die Agitation gegen die türkische Mißwirthschaft," *Vorwärts*, September 29, 1896, p. 3.

In his articles "World Power Without War: Eduard Bernstein's Proposals for an Alternative Weltpolitik, 1900-1914," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, XXV (1979), 232f., and "British Radicalism and German Revisionism: the Case of Eduard Bernstein," *The International History Review*, IV (1982), 358f., Roger Fletcher argues that Bernstein profoundly opposed Russia. On Bernstein's sympathy for Balkan peoples, see Mommsen, "Nationalismus und nationale Frage," p. 134.; and Vettes, pp. 94f.

there would be better off under the Czar, that human civilization would be advanced by strengthening Russia, or that the British navy could not be matched by the Russian fleet when joined by that of France. On October 12 Bernstein answered,

As little as the editors of *Vorwärts* do I take for a satisfactory solution Turkish Armenia coming under the Russian protectorate. Rather, I oppose a policy which pushes in that direction. It is beyond all doubt that the Armenians prefer the Czar to the Sultan if that is their only choice. Even if we disapprove of this, we cannot change it.<sup>4</sup>

By October 5, 1896, Bernstein had promised Kautsky a *Neue Zeit* article on Armenia. On October 7 Kautsky suggested that Bernstein expand the essay to discuss the entire Eastern Question. Significantly, Kautsky confessed, "In my opinion the old Marxist Eastern policy has become untenable." By "the old Marxist Eastern policy" Kautsky may have meant simply the position of Liebknecht, which the latter thought to be that of Marx; but Kautsky probably assumed that in his opposition to Russia, Marx himself had favored the Ottoman Empire. Perhaps only later, in those very texts *Vorwärts* had wanted published, did Kautsky discover that Marx had actually been critical of the Ottoman Empire. In his October 7 letter, Kautsky argued that the Empire could not be reformed and that the Czar sought to perpetuate the status quo since Turkey was dependent on Russia. Then on October 10 Kautsky sent Bernstein several articles by Luxemburg which had just appeared in the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* and which he found quite reasonable. Kautsky believed that reform was impossible because the Ottoman Empire lacked a strong central government and that past reforms had weakened the central authority, thus tending to destroy the Empire.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Anonymous [Bernstein], "Die englische Sozialdemokratie und die armenische Frage," *Vorwärts*, October 10, 1896, p. 9. *Vorwärts*, September 29, 1896, p. 3; *Vorwärts*, October 10, p. 9. Anonymous [Bernstein], "Aus England," *Vorwärts*, October 16, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>EB-KK October 5, 1896; KK-EB October 7, 1896; KK-EB October 10, 1896. KK-EB May 7, 1897. Earlier, 215.

On the views of Marx and Engels on Turkey see V. Paskaleva and K. Kossev, "Marx/Engels und einige Probleme der Orientfrage," in

Luxemburg began her article series "The National Struggles in Turkey and Social Democracy" by attacking the assumption expressed by *Vorwärts* and *Justice* that unrest in the Near East was essentially the work of Russian agents. Such an interpretation might suffice for the bourgeois but not for social democrats, she said, who looked for the underlying material causes of national affairs. According to Luxemburg, the unrest came as a consequence of reforms enacted during the nineteenth century in response to the confrontation with Europe and the threat from Russia. These reforms replaced the feudal administration with a centralized bureaucracy and standing army which in turn meant new financial impositions for the people. Luxemburg pictured the situation made worse by local administrators who exploited the people in order to pay for their offices. As the nobility became modern landowners, the peasants acquired a burden of rent in addition to the old tithe and the new taxes. Similar to Kautsky in his Erfurt Program commentary, Luxemburg suspected that the poor suffered also from insecurity:

Thus the reforms brought with them an enormous worsening of the people's material conditions. But what made them particularly unbearable was a very modern tendency which had torn its way into these conditions--insecurity: the chaotic tax system, the indefinite relations in land ownership, but especially the money economy . . . .<sup>6</sup>

Luxemburg allowed that the Turkish crisis at first reminded one of Russia following the Crimean War. However, there was an important difference: In the Ottoman Empire reforms had not been accompanied by an economic revolution. In her opinion, the region

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*Friedrich Engels 1820-1870. Referate, Diskussionen, Dokumente*, Hans Pelger, ed. (Bonn - Bad Godesberg, 1971), pp. 347f. and 352; Hentzen, pp. 64-66; and Vettes, pp. 89-91 and 95. On pp. 89-91, Vettes maintains that in 1853 Marx and Engels were critical of the Ottoman Empire and that they supported Turkey in 1878 because they feared a war would delay revolution.

<sup>6</sup>Luxemburg, "Die nationalen Kämpfe in der Türkei und die Sozialdemokratie," *Gesammelte Werke*, I/1, 57-60. The article series first appeared in the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* on October 8, 9, and 10, 1896. This and later references are to the *Gesammelte Werke* edition.



lacked the domestic preconditions for the transition to capitalism, and the foreign Powers wished to keep it an open market for their goods. With the financial burdens, the form of administration, and the impact of a money economy, two things necessarily resulted, she claimed: The peasants became more and more indebted to the local lenders; and the government, to the Europeans. Hence there were rebellions in the villages and palace revolts in Constantinople. Luxemburg argued that escape from the situation required economic and social transformation into capitalism but that there existed no class ready to accomplish the revolution. The reforms promised by the Sultan could have no effect. Here lay the roots of the nationalist movements, according to Luxemburg:

The stability of the mode of life and the exclusiveness of the provinces and nationalities had disappeared. But no material interest and no common development had been created which would unify them internally. On the contrary, the oppression and misery of all those belonging to the Turkish state grew greater and greater. So there resulted a natural tendency among the different nationalities to escape from this totality and to seek the way to a higher social development instinctively in an independent existence.

The tendency was most powerful among the Christian subject nationalities, Luxemburg thought, because the struggle of the Christian peasant against his Mohammedan landlord and state official found religious and nationalist expression. It was ridiculous to blame unrest on agents of the Czar alone.<sup>7</sup>

For Luxemburg, the Marxist character of her analysis was important. Political reforms had initiated change in Turkey; but the process was still an economically determined and necessary one. Here was an application of the principle that the political Superstructure could cause major alterations in the social-economic Basis, only to be itself altered profoundly by the Basis. Luxemburg wrote,

The impossibility of archaic economic structures continuing in Turkey in view of the fiscal system and the money economy and the impossibility of the money economy developing into capitalism—here is the key to understanding

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 60-63.

the events on the Balkan peninsula. The foundation of the existing Turkish despotism is undermined, but the foundation for its developing into a modern state is not created. Thus it has to end, not as a form of government, but as a state; not through class struggle, but through the struggle of nationalities.<sup>8</sup>

Luxemburg saw the primary conflict in the Ottoman Empire, in contrast to that in Poland, as occurring among nationalities, not between classes. Hence she could infer that the subject peoples could win independence before a proletariat there had conquered political power or, for that matter, had even emerged.

Luxemburg declared that in principle social democracy should endorse all efforts at achieving freedom. But then she continued,

Of course one should schematize (*schablonisieren*) in foreign policy as little as in domestic. The national struggle is not always the appropriate form for the freedom struggle. For example, the national question takes shape differently in Poland, Alsace-Lorraine, or Bohemia. In all these cases we have before us the directly opposite process of the capitalist assimilation of the annexed territories by the ruling country, which condemns the separatist efforts to impotence; and the interests of the workers' movement compel us to speak for a unification of forces and not for their division through national battles. In the question of the uprisings in Turkey, the context is different.

The Christian provinces were not tied economically to Turkey, she implied. There was no labor movement to consider. So social-democratic recognition of the national struggles would be beyond doubt. Luxemburg believed that liberating the Christian nationalities would provide a major clarification in European foreign relations. Also important, Luxemburg contended, freeing them would be an act of social progress: It would allow these nations to advance as bourgeois and capitalist countries. She insisted,

This separation is the only way for the Turkish provinces to achieve higher forms of social life. As long as a province

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 63.



remains under Turkish rule, a modern capitalist development is out of the question for it. Separated from Turkey it receives a European type of state and bourgeois institutions and is gradually absorbed into the general stream of capitalist development.

For Luxemburg, as for Kautsky and Bernstein, this capitalist development prepared the way for the workers' movement and for social democracy.<sup>9</sup> A period of capitalist economy and bourgeois society made possible the formation of a proletariat, a precondition of socialism.

Finally, Luxemburg argued that emancipating the subject peoples from the Sultan would help stop the Czar. The Balkan nations already liberated opposed Russian influence in the Near East, she claimed. Rid of the Christians, the Sultan's government would find new strength, allowing it more effectively to resist the Czar—which was why Russia wished to maintain the status quo. Luxemburg warned, "To advocate the integrity of Turkey today means finally to play into the hands of Russian diplomacy."<sup>10</sup>

At a Berlin assembly on November 6, 1896, the SPD leader Antrick summarized criticism of Liebknecht's editing of *Vorwärts*, including a contrast of his interpretation of the Near-East crisis to what Antrick understood a materialist analysis to be. Antrick added,

At the party congress [in Gotha in October 1896] the editor-in-chief explained that each opinion within the party should find expression in the central organ. Nonetheless *Vorwärts* rejected articles which had been offered to it first and which dealt with the events in Armenia from a strictly materialistic standpoint.

On November 11 Liebknecht published a stinging reply to this charge:

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 63-65. See earlier, 201.

<sup>10</sup>Luxemburg, "Die nationalen Kämpfe in der Türkei," pp. 65-68. Commentary on Luxemburg's views about Turkey is also found in Hentzen, pp. 57-62; in Michael Dulany Richards, "Reform or Revolution. Rosa Luxemburg and the Marxist Movement, 1893-1914," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969, pp. 28f.; and in Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, I, 100.

I did indeed reject the article in question, which Miss Rosa Luxemburg had sent in, because the author does not judge matters in Armenia from her own perspective and knowledge but rather simply takes the well known allegations of the Russian and Gladstonean propaganda press and arranges them according to a socialist schema (Schablone). Any comrade who enjoys working with schemas could have done that in Germany too. That the Armenian rebellion has to do with economic conditions should be clear to the youngest pupil of socialism—even the predatory attacks of the most backward African tribes can be reduced to economic causes.

Liebknecht appealed to the authority of Marx:

While I was in England during the Crimean War, I studied the Eastern Question in the greatest detail; and by consulting Karl Marx and by following the school of the genius David Urquhart, the best expert on Turkish conditions and on Russian diplomacy, I arrived at the understanding of the Eastern Question which I have since then always advocated and the correctness of which is confirmed daily by the development of events.

Liebknecht stated that Russia was seeking to destroy the Ottoman Empire, and then he recommended,

Miss Rosa Luxemburg, who is a Pole after all, might find a more fertile field if she occupied herself with the Russian atrocities in Poland and in Russia itself. Then she would not run the danger of doing a service despite herself for the "protector of European absolutism."<sup>11</sup>

Luxemburg responded firmly to Liebknecht's charges. In her opinion, Liebknecht also held a kind of economic explanation of the Eastern Question, one reducing modern Near Eastern history to bribery.

<sup>11</sup>*Vorwärts*, November 8, 1896, p. 9. LHAP 14920, Bl. 499f., the police report on the meeting at which Antrick spoke. Wilhelm Liebknecht, "Erklärung," *Vorwärts*, November 11, p. 4. The 1896 congress of the SPD took place in Gotha from October 11 to 16.

A truly Marxist interpretation would be very different, she believed. She wrote,

It was not at all a matter of making the cheap discovery that there is some kind of economic basis to the Armenian movement. This would indeed be nothing but a schema (Schablone). It was a matter of reconstructing Turkey's economic development out of the known but usually dispersed and confusingly presented facts of social life in Turkey, of sketching its inner driving force and direction, and of deducing from this on the one hand the political consequences, on the other the interests of social democracy in the East—in brief, not of explaining the history of Turkey from the Russian Ruble but rather the reverse of explaining the Russian Ruble from Turkish history, and not of forcing events to fit our ossified slogans but rather on the contrary of adjusting our slogans to the living events.<sup>12</sup>

Here Luxemburg had described Marxism understood as a method of analysis.

Next she argued that Liebknecht's failure to comprehend the Eastern predicament resulted, ironically perhaps, from his obtaining his views back when he was directly associated with Marx. According to Luxemburg, both material and political conditions in the Near East had changed a full 180 degrees since the Crimean War; and as facts developed into their antitheses, so too did ideas. Forty years before, Russia had wanted to break apart the Ottoman Empire, she explained, and social democrats had accordingly sought to preserve it. Now Russia wished to maintain the Ottoman Empire; so by continuing the old social-democratic policy, *Vorwärts* failed to understand either Russian diplomacy or the unrest and violence in the Near East. Luxemburg feared,

Out of sheer enmity toward Russia, *Vorwärts* has slid into the position of Russian diplomacy. Since it tries to thwart imagined plans of Russia, it becomes the unwitting advocate

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<sup>12</sup>Luxemburg, "Zur Orientpolitik des 'Vorwärts,'" *Gesammelte Werke*, I/1, 69-71. It appeared in the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* on November 25, 1896; and in *Vorwärts* on November 25, 1896, p. 9. This and later references are to the *Gesammelte Werke* edition.

of her real plans; and since the real events disturb its illusion, it simply declares reality to be illusion.<sup>13</sup>

With this Luxemburg supported the position that some of Marx's own opinions might become outdated and that the true Marxist might arrive at conclusions opposite to some once held by Marx.

Luxemburg rejected Liebknecht's suggestion, as she took it, that she limit her writing to Poland and leave the Eastern Question to him. She found the proposed "division of labor" particularly unacceptable since Liebknecht had allegedly encouraged Polish nationalism with phrases from the time of the Crimean War.<sup>14</sup>

Though he believed that Luxemburg had presented a position on the Eastern Question with which he could agree, Bernstein chose to publish, with unexpected consequences, his *Neue Zeit* essay "German Social Democracy and the Turkish Troubles." From the first he praised Luxemburg's analysis:

This essay was nearly completed when I received the issues of the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* with the articles by Miss Rosa Luxemburg about social democracy and the national struggles in Turkey. From the following it will be noted how much I agree with the basic thought of and the final conclusions drawn in this excellent article.<sup>15</sup>

It is not clear, however, that Bernstein understood Luxemburg entirely. Apparently, he did not agree with her on certain fundamental assumptions.

As in his writing on South Africa, Bernstein asserted that a party the size of the SPD should not only protest the actions of the government but also seek to influence policy. An exception to this responsibility would occur if German social democrats concurred with their government's position on the Armenian question. But before they

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 71-73.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73. Earlier, 223.

<sup>15</sup>Bernstein, "Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und die türkischen Wirren," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 108 note 1.

could judge this position, Bernstein believed, social democrats needed to specify their principles concerning liberation movements.<sup>16</sup>

It would appear that Bernstein accepted Luxemburg's distinction as he understood it that social democracy should sympathize with all liberation movements but that "the national struggle is not always the appropriate form for the freedom struggle."<sup>17</sup> But by what criteria could one decide in the case of a specific conflict? Bernstein decided,

Not every struggle of dominated peoples against their rulers, however, is an emancipation struggle in the same way. Some African tribes claim the right to engage in the slave trade and can be kept from it only by the civilized European nations. Their revolts against the latter leave us cold; in some cases we will even oppose them. The same is true for those barbaric and half-barbaric peoples who make a permanent business out of invading agricultural neighbors, out of stealing livestock, etc. Peoples which are enemies of culture or who are incapable of culture have no right to our sympathy when they rebel against culture. We do not recognize a right to steal or to prey upon agriculture. In a word, as critical as we are of the culture achieved so far, we nonetheless recognize its relative achievements and make it the criterion of our taking sides. We shall condemn and fight certain methods of subduing savages, but not the act of

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 108f.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109. This quotation from Luxemburg is earlier, 221.

In attempting to assess Bernstein's supposed agreement with Luxemburg but also his difference from her, one might compare the following two sets of statements. Luxemburg: "Prinzipiell steht die Sozialdemokratie immer auf der Seite der freiheitlichen Bestrebungen." "Nicht immer ist der nationale Kampf die entsprechende Form für den freiheitlichen Kampf." ("Die nationalen Kämpfe in der Türkei und die Sozialdemokratie," p. 63) Bernstein: "Von vornherein liegt es nahe, jeder Emanzipationsbewegung unsere Sympathie zu schenken." "Nicht jeder Kampf beherrscher Völkerschaften gegen ihre Oberherren ist jedoch in gleicher Weise ein Emanzipationskampf." ("Die türkischen Wirren," p. 109)

subduing savages and asserting against them the rights of a higher culture.<sup>18</sup>

In this paragraph Bernstein differed from Luxemburg. She had favored the independence of subject nations in the Ottoman Empire because she believed that their independence would permit the development of capitalism and hence the formation of the working class. She had opposed the demand for an independent Poland because she believed that it contradicted economic development and the proletariat's growth as a revolutionary force. But when Bernstein denied sympathy for certain native uprisings against European colonial rule, here he did so not in the name of the development of capitalism and the formation of a revolutionary proletariat but rather in regard to a supposedly advancing human civilization. Bernstein and Luxemburg did not agree on colonialism; differences existed between the two on this issue, as on others. It was one thing for Armenians and Cretans to develop their own capitalist systems free of Turkey; quite another for Africans to have a money economy imposed on them. Still, when Liebknecht answered Luxemburg that even the raids of "backward" tribes were economically motivated, he indirectly attacked Bernstein, too.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Bernstein, "Die türkischen Wirren," p. 109.

In "A Revisionist Looks at Imperialism: Eduard Bernstein's Critique of Imperialism and Kolonialpolitik, 1900-1914," *Central European History*, XII (1979), 269, and in "Bernstein in Britain: Revisionism and Foreign Affairs," *The International History Review*, I (1979), 368f., Roger Fletcher studies Bernstein's idea of advanced cultures having rights over lower cultures in relationship to Social Darwinism and to British Liberalism.

In "Great Historical Failure: Marxist Theories of Nationalism," *Capital & Class*, XXV (1985), 58-83, Ephraim Nimni discusses the significance of Hegel's idea of "non-historical peoples" as adapted by Marx and Engels for the view on nationalism allegedly held by Kautsky, Luxemburg, and others. Bernstein is not named, however. See also Mommsen, "Nationalismus und nationale Frage," p. 138.

<sup>19</sup>For Liebknecht's reference to "predatory attacks" by "backward" tribes, see earlier, 223. For Luxemburg on capitalism, see earlier, 221f.

The author does not share Bernstein's assumptions about higher



In referring to some African tribes rebelling against European nations, Bernstein had returned to Bax's proposition that one should arm tribal uprisings in order to bring capitalism to its knees. Bernstein pressed his attack,

If a while ago a socialist could make the suggestion of giving aid to the savages and barbarians in their fight against the advancing capitalist civilization, it is an expression of Romanticism which only has to be pursued to its consequences in order to prove it untenable.

Here, in contrast to the passage above, Bernstein does appear to have connected the issue of liberation struggles to the issue of capitalist development. Or at least, Bax perceived a connection. Within two weeks

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and lower cultures. I do not wish to imply that either Kautsky or Luxemburg held them.

To many people the suggestion that social democrats could tolerate colonialism at all may seem shocking. However, it appears that Bernstein's position in the mid-1890's was not so much that social democrats should endorse some colonialism as that they should face the assumed inevitability of colonialism and try to check its worst aspects. He thought that one should work hard to protect the native populations and should condemn any violation of them. Social democrats should be very hesitant to cooperate with undemocratic governments. Bernstein's position implied that social democrats should generally oppose German imperialism but that they should seek to accomplish this through political action in Germany, not by arming natives in the colonies.

Luxemburg would lead in this political opposition in Germany, vociferously condemning imperialism. However, instead of fighting colonialism abroad to hasten collapse at home, the approach suggested by Bax, she sought to prepare the proletariat for revolution to end capitalism at home and hence colonialism abroad.

On Bernstein and imperialism see Hans-Christoph Schröder, "Eduard Bernsteins Stellung zum Imperialismus vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, pp. 167 and 184-191. On Luxemburg and imperialism see Joseph A. Petrus, "The Theory and Practice of Internationalism: Rosa Luxemburg's Solution to the National Question," *East European Quarterly*, IV (January 1971), 447-455; Netti, *Rosa Luxemburg*, II, 522-535 and 830-841; Hans-Christoph Schröder, *Sozialistische Imperialismusdeutung*, pp. 18f.; and Fletcher, "A Revisionist Looks at Imperialism," pp. 248-251.

he replied harshly in *Justice*. The ensuing polemic included Bax's accusation that Bernstein had abandoned social democracy for Fabianism.<sup>20</sup>

Bernstein sought a standard by which to endorse some liberation movements but not others. He argued, on the one hand, that a liberation movement deserving of sympathy would contribute to cultural progress. A progressive social class might resist oppression by a backward class, for example. Or a people with its own culture might rebel against a foreign ruler who restricted their development. Bernstein insisted, "We recognize the right to nationality of each people which has shown itself capable of developing or sustaining a national cultural life (Kulturleben)." On the other hand, Bernstein believed that freedom for an obscure nationality outside Europe did not outweigh the free development of "highly civilized" European peoples. When the struggle of such a minor nation seriously endangered progress in Europe, social democrats need not assist that nation's struggle.<sup>21</sup>

At this point Bernstein returned to the issue of timing social-democratic demands, the issue which had played such an important role

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<sup>20</sup>Bernstein, "Die türkischen Wirren," pp. 109f. For Bax's counterattack, see later, 279-281. On Bernstein's reply to Bax see also Paul, p. 128.

While Kautsky opposed colonialism, he did not favor supplying arms to native rebellions. Concerning Kautsky's views on colonialism see Dick Geary, *Karl Kautsky* (New York, 1987), Chapter Four; Fletcher, "A Revisionist Looks at Imperialism," pp. 244-246; Hans-Christoph Schröder, *Sozialismus und Imperialismus. Die Auseinandersetzung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie mit dem Imperialismusproblem und der "Weltpolitik" vor 1914* (Bonn - Bad Godesberg, 1974), pp. 162-164; and Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 73-75. On p. 75 in Steenson, Kautsky is seen as talking of cooperation with the native populations in the colonies.

Comparing Bernstein's earlier reference to "higher culture" with his later reference to "capitalist civilization" raises the question of how, if at all, he might have connected the two. See below, 396; Schröder, "Eduard Bernsteins Stellung zum Imperialismus," p. 179; and *Marxism and Social Democracy: The Revisionist Debate 1896-1898*, H. Tudor and J. M. Tudor, eds. (New York, 1988), pp. 13f.

<sup>21</sup>Bernstein, "Die türkischen Wirren," p. 110.

in the debates on the suffrage in Prussia and Saxony and on Poland. Bernstein repeated the words "seriously endangered." He felt it insufferable to use some mere inconvenience or mere possibility of danger as an excuse for rejecting a small nation's struggle against oppression, even when the rejection included a reference to the "final victory of socialism" which would bring "salvation" to all oppressed. He complained,

It is well known that even the recent socialist congress in London employed this pretty argument to pull itself from a trap when it had to comment on the controversy among Polish socialists regarding their position on the question of re-establishing Poland.

Bernstein labeled this appeal to the final victory of socialism a meaningless phrase, a "utopian reference to the Last Judgment." Luxemburg had provided better arguments against demanding Polish independence, he thought. The Italians had not waited for the final victory of socialism; neither had the workers in the battle to improve their living conditions. He declared that every nationality possessed the right to fight for its freedom, whether or not social democracy supported it or even opposed it, as European revolutionaries had once opposed the Christian subject peoples in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>22</sup>

Bernstein agreed that European social democracy had for many years correctly seen Russia as its major enemy and hence had upheld the Ottoman Empire. Nonetheless, in a digression perhaps intended against *Vorwärts* or *Justice*, Bernstein reasoned that there was no grounds to be surprised or upset with those French socialists who had failed to oppose expenditures for the Czar's recent visit to their country. The Franco-Russian alliance had restored France to the status of a Great Power; it protected France from Germany. As if in reply to Bax and the SDF, Bernstein continued,

The thesis that proletarians have no fatherland becomes modified from the moment, where, and to the degree to which they can participate as fully entitled citizens in determining the government and laws of their country and

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<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 110f. Mommsen, "Nationalismus und nationale Frage," p. 137. See above, 208 and also 184. Compare Bernstein's view with that of Kautsky, above, 205.

can structure its institutions according to their wishes. The history and institutions of France work together to develop patriotism in the French laborer; and while there are nations at all, little in this will change for some time. Moreover, national identity does not exclude international consciousness and action, just as little as internationalism forbids the guarding of national interests.<sup>23</sup>

Bernstein again assailed the assumption of Liebknecht and the SDF that the Ottoman Empire constituted a bulwark against Russia:

Does Turkey indeed offer protection against Russia still today? No one of sound mind will want to assert this. Eaten up from within, incapable of making its way up to a modern type of state it has become the toy of Russian diplomacy. The Sultan sees in Russia his noblest protector; as Russia whistles, he dances. In its present constitution Turkey is not only no threatening neighbor to Russia, rather on the contrary the most pleasant she can wish for. It is no exaggeration to say that the Turk is standing guard for Russia on the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

The basic reason that the Empire could not modernize was economic, Bernstein thought. He alleged that the Turks had remained conquerors, exploiting the subject nationalities; that a decentralized administration and the transition to a money economy worsened the situation; and that for the Armenians the so-called "Turkish freedom" meant oppression. According to Bernstein, reform of the Ottoman Empire required strong government, but earlier reform efforts had lessened governmental power. What was destroying the Ottoman Empire, he decided, were these piecemeal reforms—not the past "amputations," as he called them. He saw these "amputations" as decreasing the anomaly of peoples capable of culture being dominated by a people whom he judged less cultured. Bernstein felt that since only Russia benefited from the current circumstances social democrats could speak up for the Armenians and that social democrats should advocate cutting off the "centrifugal parts" of the Ottoman Empire and turning the rest into a

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<sup>23</sup>Bernstein, "Die türkischen Wirren," pp. 111f. For Bax's views on national interests, see above, 169f. Mommsen, "Nationalismus und nationale Frage," pp. 139f. See also *Justice*, September 19, 1896, p. 4.

viable unified state with a European-style administration. He hoped that a transformed Turkey would be independent of Russia.<sup>24</sup>

Bernstein finished by returning to his personal concern that the German people had so often missed their chance to serve the cause of freedom. They should not miss this one.<sup>25</sup>

In the article on Turkey, Bernstein brought together key ideas upon which he had been working since the Jameson raid and the "Kruger Telegram." It contained propositions which would later figure prominently in the Revisionist Controversy: that capitalism would necessarily expand abroad; that in some countries social democrats could attempt to make colonialism more humane; that the SPD had some responsibility for national policy and should consider legitimate national interests; that the proletariat could have patriotic feelings; that it was wrong to delay reforms until the final victory of socialism; that conditions had changed so that certain of Marx's opinions might no longer apply. Bernstein's article series "Problems of Socialism," often seen as the beginning of his revisionism, began in the next issue of *Neue Zeit*.<sup>26</sup>

Bernstein's article on Turkey elicited a suggestion of concern from a close friend. On November 9, 1896, Adler wrote Kautsky that he found Bernstein's article "really unbelievable" concerning the nationalism of the French.<sup>27</sup>

Almost immediately Kautsky replied that he was pleased with the article. He excused Bernstein's arguments concerning the French because they were directed against *Vorwärts*. For Kautsky it was important to try to understand the French. On the central issue of how to interpret Marx, Kautsky sided with Bernstein. Kautsky wrote Adler,

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<sup>24</sup>Bernstein, "Die türkischen Wirren," pp. 112-115. Vettes, p. 96.

<sup>25</sup>Bernstein, "Die türkischen Wirren," p. 116. Earlier, 216.

<sup>26</sup>On the significance of this article for revisionism, see also Peter Strutynski, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Marxisten und Revisionisten in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung um die Jahrhundertwende* (Köln, 1976), pp. 120-122.

<sup>27</sup>Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 219.

Regarding the crucial point, the Eastern Question, I completely agree with Ede, and I have taken his article to be even more important since Liebknecht's totally unbelievable position on the question hides behind the authority of Marx. Today L. still stands on all issues where he stood at the time of the Crimean War. But what was right then can be wrong now, and is for the most part.

... In the Eastern like the Polish question, I am simply of the opinion that the old Marxist position has become untenable--just like his attitude toward the Czechs. It would be completely non-Marxist to close one's eyes to the facts and to keep insisting on the old Marxist position.<sup>28</sup>

Kautsky endorsed Bernstein's accepting the view that an authentically Marxist analysis might end in results which both contradicted opinions expressed by Marx himself and defied teachings of what had become the "orthodox Marxism" of the SPD. Kautsky supported Bernstein in part because Bernstein had developed his ideas in order to defend a Marxist methodology against the interpretation propagated by Liebknecht and the SDF. Kautsky's continued battle with Liebknecht and the SDF may have predisposed him to overlook differences between himself and his best friend and closest ally in the defense of mature Marxism.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 220f. Compare above, 218.

<sup>29</sup>Earlier, 218 and 225.



Chapter Five: The Theory Debates of 1896  
(Summer and Fall)

During 1896 five major political controversies forced Kautsky and Bernstein to develop further their understanding of Marxism. Polemics on South Africa and the Ottoman Empire raised concerns about capitalism expanding abroad. Defense of the suffrage in Saxony and the issue of Polish independence prompted Bernstein to challenge using the expectation of catastrophe to excuse inaction on important matters. These two issues and the London Congress renewed the question of finding reforms appropriate to a particular stage of economic and social evolution. Twice, certain judgments believed to have been made by Marx in decades past were found by some to be no longer relevant. The five controversies generated discussion of how one should correctly employ Marxism--as a method of research and analysis or as a model of how history would occur and a set of prescribed policies. During the second half of 1896, Kautsky and Bernstein debated the meaning of Marxism in polemics over theory, too. By November the disputes over theory merged with those over politics as their views on Marxism as a philosophy of history and approach to the writing of history became associated with their stands on South Africa and the Ottoman Empire. There appeared a connection between one's understanding of theory and one's political tactic.

A. Kanner and the "Bourgeois Ideologists"

The intense polemic which Kautsky conducted with Ernest Belfort-Bax in the last half of 1896 began in a controversy stemming from an event which seems as distant from the intricacies of Marxist theory as the Jameson raid: The Vienna city government slashed funds for popular education, prompting a protest meeting on July 6, 1896. Professors and other progressive bourgeois interested in popular education had organized the meeting. However, social democrats asked for and received the chair. In this capacity Adler had occasion to refer to the assembled professors as "bourgeois ideologists."<sup>1</sup>

At the time Dr. Heinrich Kanner, editor of the Vienna weekly *Die Zeit* and associate of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, acted as a spokesman

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<sup>1</sup>Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Friedrich Adler, ed. (Vienna, 1954), p. 213 note 10 and pp. 216f. note 12a.

for the "social politicians," progressive Austrian bourgeois committed to helping the laborers. Kanner identified with what he perceived the Fabians to be doing in England. In his editorial "Naughty Children" on July 11, Kanner criticized Adler for having disparaged the bourgeois members of the Popular Education Society, even though they had called the meeting out of concern for the workers. Kanner thought that to label people "bourgeois ideologists" was, for social democrats, to call them fools. Allegedly, Adler had said that only socialists had nothing to fear from science, that for the propertied classes to promote popular education was for them to "saw off the branch on which they sat." If Adler were right, Kanner reasoned, then the social policy of progressive bourgeois (Marx, Lassalle, and Adler included) was wrong, for they would be betraying their own class. However, Kanner insisted, the whole class-struggle theory was mistaken. He believed that the real conflict lay not between classes but rather between insightful persons and irrational ones and that educated workers and progressive bourgeois belonged to the first group while many proletarians were in the second. Kanner claimed that Lassalle had taught respect for the bourgeoisie. To Kanner, that the social democrats lacked such respect made them "naughty children."<sup>2</sup>

The social-democratic *Arbeiterzeitung* immediately answered with a quotation from Lassalle saying that "ideologists" were merely those who lived with books and ideas and who were ready to sacrifice for ideas. With his phrase "bourgeois ideologists" Adler had honored the meeting's organizers. However, in his editorial "Lassalleana" on July 18, Kanner disagreed. He maintained that Lassalle had tried to give the word a positive meaning, that he had failed, and that after his death Marxists employed the term "ideologist" in a deprecating manner, especially when combined with "bourgeois." Kanner saw in Lassalle an example of the bourgeois who recognized the necessity of the social development and realized that it was in the interest of the bourgeoisie as well as the proletariat to further the process. According to Kanner, Lassalle called for reconciliation between classes and for social reform through influence on public opinion. After Lassalle's death the view expressed in the *Communist Manifesto* triumphed in the social-democratic movement. Kanner continued,

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 213 note 10. Heinrich Kanner, "Unartige Kinder," *Die Zeit*, July 11, 1896.

According to it the labor movement . . . is exclusively a class movement; and the means of liberating the proletariat is the power of the masses, which are organized and eventually carry out a revolution, a "wild proletarian revolution" in which the bourgeois receive no role other than that of the conquered.

Fortunately, in Kanner's opinion, social-democratic thinking was changing; supposedly even Engels rejected proletarian revolution.

With this, however, the whole post-Lassallean revolutionary program of social democracy collapses. If there is no revolution, then one can hope for success only through peaceful reform. . . .

Nevertheless social democracy continues to cling to the tactical consequences of the Marxist revolutionary program.<sup>3</sup>

The *Arbeiterzeitung* chose not to continue the polemic with *Die Zeit*.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps, in part, Adler and other social democrats found Kanner difficult to debate because from their viewpoint his position was confused. Kanner overlooked the need for a democratic republic before proletarian rule and true socialist reforms would be possible; accordingly, he failed to distinguish between social democrats and state socialists. He set up a dichotomy between violent political revolution and piecemeal reforms, thus excluding the social-democratic judgement that a bourgeois political revolution would be necessary in countries like Austria before the gradual social transition from capitalism to socialism could take place. Kanner's emphasis on socialism as the work of those intelligent enough to comprehend the inevitable historical evolution had anti-democratic implications; it also tended toward utopianism. Kanner praised Lassalle for Marx's idea of cooperating with the progressive bourgeois, and implicitly he blamed Marx for the Lassalleans' "one reactionary mass."

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<sup>3</sup>Heinrich Kanner, "Lassalleana," *Die Zeit*, July 18, 1896, pp. 33f.

<sup>4</sup>Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 216f. note 12a.

## B. Ernest Belfort-Bax and the Meaning of Marxism

In his July 11 edition of *Die Zeit*, Kanner further assailed social democracy by publishing Ernest Belfort-Bax's article "The Materialist Doctrine of History." In it Bax criticized an "extreme materialism," a one-sided economic determinism. According to Bax,

The materialist view of historical development begins with the premise that human social life in all its dimensions—thus including the ethical, spiritual, and artistic—is either the direct effect of economic conditions, i.e., the conditions of production and exchange of products, or their reflection in ideas.

Taken in its extreme form, this view thus says nothing less than that morality, religion, and art are not merely influenced by economic conditions but rather originate solely from the mental reflex (*Gedankenreflex*) of these conditions in the social consciousness.

A footnote added that Marx would not have approved Kautsky's thought.

"I myself am not a Marxist," he [Marx] once wrote himself; and he would certainly have repeated this statement if he had seen the recent work of the "Marxists" Plekhanov, Mehring, or Kautsky.

Bax conceded that the materialistic method came closer to the truth than did the older approach which saw philosophical insight determining an age, but he believed that this fact did not justify extreme materialism. Instead, Bax advocated a third alternative: Civilization resulted from a synthesis of outer, material conditions with an inner, independent psychological drive. He explained,

Human speculative, ethical, and artistic capabilities exist as such in human society, even if undeveloped, from the very beginning. They are not merely products of the material factors of human existence, even though their expression in each age in the past was always modified by these factors to at least a small and very often to a significant degree. . . . Society has a specific economic development, but it also possesses a specific spiritual development, and it is in the

interaction of the two that social evolution in its concrete form results.<sup>1</sup>

According to Bax, the economic evolution's supplying the context in which an idea could be realized was not the same as its causing the idea in the first place. Bax argued that the faculty of reason could not be reduced to a "psychological reflection of economic conditions." He employed an analogy from nature: Soil and climate provided the external situation for the growth of a plant; but growth occurred only from a seed containing a genetic inheritance independent of the environment. No matter how many generations one went back, there would always be soil and seed. In Bax's analysis, the socialist movements in Germany and England illustrated how even in the modern economic-dominated age the psychological might vary from the material. Germany, Bax observed, had a more powerful socialist party even though in England the material conditions for socialism were more advanced; this was because in England the psychological factor was weak compared to the one in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

Bax admitted that in most of human history the material element had predominated. But there were exceptions when the psychological ruled, as in early Christianity with its belief in the imminent end of the age or in immortality. When physical needs went unsatisfied, when there occurred class conflict over economic interests, then material aspects predominated, Bax reasoned. The latter condition characterized the modern age, hence the popularity of materialism. Bax acknowledged a difficulty in imagining a time when people were not motivated solely by economic concerns, when society was ruled by theology, chivalry, or tribal attachment. Still, Bax believed that with

<sup>1</sup>Ernest Belfort-Bax, "Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," *Die Zeit*, July 11, 1896, p. 20. The essay was later published in English; see Ernest Belfort-Bax, "The Materialist Doctrine of History" in *Outspoken Essays On Social Subjects* (London, 1897), pp. 47-59.

On Bax's philosophy see Stanley Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism. The Struggle for a New Consciousness* (Ithaca, New York, 1973), pp. 90-97; and Stanley Pierson, "Ernest Belfort Bax: 1854-1926. The Encounter of Marxism and Late Victorian Culture," *The Journal of British Studies*, XII (November 1972), 43-49 and 55-57.

<sup>2</sup>Bax, "Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," pp. 20f.



the end of social classes and with greater human power over nature, the psychological drive would rise again, becoming relatively free of the material and finally determining human life.<sup>3</sup>

Bax's article in *Die Zeit* angered Kautsky. On July 15 he condemned the essay in a letter to Bernstein:

Mushy, confused prattle, and of an unequalled impertinence. Like all eclectics, he rides around on Marx's statement that he was no Marxist and adds, "Marx would have . . . repeated this statement if he had seen the works of the 'Marxists' Plekhanov, Mehring, or Kautsky."

Bernstein replied on July 17, agreeing that what Bax had done was bad.<sup>4</sup>

In his *Neue Zeit* article "The Materialist Conception of History and the Psychological Drive," Kautsky first questioned Bax's implication that he was challenging not true Marxism but a vulgar rendition.

We disciples of the method of scientific socialism founded by Marx and Engels are decidedly unlucky. Not only the adversaries of Marx and Engels fight us—which is a matter of course. No, there are also people who sometimes praise Marx and Engels extravagantly but who find it irreconcilable with the dignity of a free thinker to apply their teachings consistently. They take very seriously Marx's joke that he himself was not a Marxist, and they would love best to make people believe that Marx considered those who accepted his viewpoints to be idiots totally incapable of any independent thought. Or they explain that the Marxists are altogether incapable of understanding Marx and that they, the non-Marxists, are called to protect Marx's teachings from the dogma fanaticism of the Marxists.

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 21f. Compare Ernest Belfort Bax, *Outlooks From the New Standpoint* (London, 1891), pp. 132-134.

<sup>4</sup>KK-EB July 15, 1896; EB-KK July 17, 1896. On July 29, Kautsky wrote his wife Luise from London that Bax had apologized for the footnote, saying that someone else composed it. Kautsky Family Papers, IISH.

Kautsky said that he did not know who subscribed to the theory which Bax ridiculed—i.e., the theory that religion, art, and morals were merely mental reflections of material conditions. Bax allowed that Marx did not hold such a theory. Kautsky denied that any serious Marxist did so. Kautsky wrote,

The materialist conception of history which Bax fights is thus neither Marx's understanding nor the one, allegedly differing from Marx, of the Marxists. We surrender it to Bax with pleasure and feel not at all affected when he stomps it into the ground.<sup>5</sup>

In Kautsky's analysis, Bax believed that historical materialism needed to be supplemented with a psychological drive because he had distorted the theory to begin with. So an accurate presentation of Marxism would eliminate any call for Bax to correct it. To Kautsky, the theory need not be supplemented in the manner Bax proposed because it was not intended to account for all cultural phenomena, rather only for historical change:

Unfortunately the Marxist materialist conception of history is much too limited and one-sided to claim the wish to explain mental capacity . . . or all that has happened. It wants to be nothing more than just a conception of history, a method for exploring the driving forces of social development.

It would surely be absurd if one claimed that a piece of art or a philosophical system in itself were merely the product of social and lastly economic relationships. But it is also not at all the task of a conception of history to explain artistic or philosophic creations. It merely has to explain the changes to which this creation is subjected in various ages. No doubt, without mental capacity no ideas. Yet, will this deep insight take me even one step further in examining the question of why the ideas of the nineteenth century are different from

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<sup>5</sup>Kautsky, "Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung und der psychologische Antrieb," *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 652-654.

those of the thirteenth and these again different from those of antiquity?<sup>6</sup>

Kautsky assumed that to understand cultural change one must identify that which alters autonomously over historical periods of time. Neither human mental capability nor physical nature did so, he argued. In contrast, social structure changed dramatically over time, resting ultimately on evolving economic relationships. Kautsky maintained that compared to such dynamic material conditions, ideological aspects were conservative:

Thus economic relationships are not the only factor which determines "human affairs," the "whole of human life," but among those factors decisive for human affairs they are the only variable element. The others are constant, varying not at all or only under the influence of changes in the variable element; thus they are not driving forces of historical development even if they are essential elements of human life.

The materialist historian never "overlooks" nor even once underestimates the significance of the "psychological" factor in history. However, far from functioning as a driving force in historical development, this factor instead reveals itself as an essentially conservative element. Every historian knows what a great force tradition represents in history. Whereas economic development knows no cessation, human consciousness has the urge to remain in the established forms of thinking; it does not follow the economic development directly but rather petrifies and persists in the old forms long after the economic and social conditions which created those forms have disappeared.

According to Kautsky, economic conditions would forge far ahead before particularly insightful persons developed new norms for morals, law, and the organizing of society in response to the new conditions. Even this revolution in thinking might express itself in conservative terms. When new ideas finally broke with the old, Kautsky believed, the class struggle was already so far advanced that ideas appeared to bring change. Those following the historical materialist method could

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 654f.

not overlook the role of ideas, Kautsky asserted; but they did not stop there:

They research more deeply and discover that the sequence of ideas is not accidental and arbitrary but rather lawful; that to each distinct economic era of humankind correspond certain forms of religion, mores, and law which one finds in all climates, for all races; and that wherever one can trace the corresponding changes, the change in economic conditions leads and the change in human attitudes only follows it hesitantly, thus that the latter is explained by the former and not vice versa.

This is the materialist conception of history—not the one developed by Bax, but certainly that of Marx and Engels . . . and also that of their disciples. That the Bax critique and also the Bax "improvement" do not apply to this understanding is clear.<sup>7</sup>

Kautsky had attributed Bax's misinterpreting historical materialism to his confusing historical change with all human existence. Kautsky further suspected that Bax confused material conditions with material interests, i.e., forces and relations of production with personal gain. For example, Bax thought that an emphasis on material conditions made it difficult to understand that in former ages people could be motivated by theology, chivalry, or tribal association. Satirically Kautsky replied,

What ordinary fools we materialists really are! All the more refined stirrings of the human soul exceeding the drive to make money are incomprehensible to us. The virtues of chivalry, fidelity, and selflessness cannot be understood by materialists but only by selected idealists, among which Bax apparently counts himself.

For Kautsky, Marx had already answered this criticism:

It is well known that in 1859 he set forth the theory of historical materialism in the Preface to his "Critique of Political Economy." An American critic pointed out

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 655-657.

immediately what our English critic now also discovers: Marx explained in the Preface that "the mode of production of material life determines the overall social, political, and intellectual life process"; to which the critic responded, "All this may be true for today's world where material interests dominate, but not for the Middle Ages where Catholicism nor for Athens and Rome where politics dominated." In a note in "Capital" Marx mentions in this regard, "First of all it is strange that someone wishes to presume that these well known phrases about the Middle Ages and antiquity were unknown to anyone. So much is clear that the Middle Ages could not live on Catholicism, nor antiquity on politics. On the contrary, the manner and means by which they won their livelihood explain why politics there and Catholicism here played the main role."<sup>8</sup>

Kautsky challenged Bax with the question,

... where have materialist historians maintained that human beings in their actions are determined solely by material interests, i.e., by self-interest? Here Bax commits the downright horrendous mistake of confusing material interests, which form the conscious motives for the acts of individuals, with material conditions, which form the foundation of a particular society and thereby also of the thought and feelings of the members of this society!

Hence Bax contradicted himself when he made personal self-interest, an internal psychological element, into an external material force. Instead of the alternation he claimed to see between psychological and material, Bax presented a succession of dominant psychological factors. In Kautsky's opinion, the succession posed the real question for the historian: Why did a specific psychological factor dominate a particular age? To answer the question, historical materialism turned to changes in the social structure, while Bax posited his psychological drive propelling itself from one stage to the next. According to Kautsky,

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 657. See also Alfred Schmidt, "Historischer Materialismus in den späten Arbeiten von Engels," in *Friedrich Engels 1820-1970. Referate, Diskussionen, Dokumente*, Hans Pelger, ed. (Bonn - Bad Godesberg, 1971), pp. 221-223.

He simply explains the changes in the psychological drive at the beginning of Christendom to be a consequence--of the psychological drive, which like Münchhausen pulls itself out of the mud by its own ponytail.<sup>9</sup>

Bax replied in mid-October in the *Neue Zeit* article "The Synthetic vs. the Neo-Marxist Conception of History." He regretted the footnote but added,

I was of the opinion that Marx and, according to certain statements on his part, Engels too would have seen the Kautsky-Mehring-Plekhanov interpretation of the materialist conception of history as somewhat too schematically (schablonenhaft) worked out. However, I will grant Kautsky the entire personal question. As far as I am concerned, both Marx and Engels could have been Marxists in Kautsky's sense or not; the main thing for me is whether the method suffices to explain all human history in its concreteness or whether it requires some "improvement" in my sense at all.

According to Bax, Kautsky was wrong to think that only material conditions changed autonomously; everything had constant and dynamic aspects. Many ideological phenomena could not be derived from economic conditions. For example, the history of philosophy in its three major periods--Ancient, Medieval, and Descartes to Hegel--could not be explained by economic causes. Rather, philosophy experienced a "revolution in thought"--by which Bax meant, presumably, an immanent logical development. He judged that it would be harmless for Kautsky to reply that an economy must first evolve to the point of allowing leisure for philosophy because this condition satisfied only a negative requirement. The original impulse for philosophy came from observation of physical nature and from analysis of human consciousness. Bax challenged the "Neo-Marxists" to provide an explanation of philosophy in the time of Plato and Aristotle or from

<sup>9</sup>Kautsky, "Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," pp. 657f.



Kant to Hegel. Bax described many ways, besides in social-economic structure, that Greece had altered since Aristotle's day.<sup>10</sup>

Bax would not agree with "extreme materialists" that the economic basis was the single motor of history. He defended his phrase "mental reflex," stating that Engels had used the phrase "psychological reflections of economic processes." Bax added,

I can only say that if the materialist conception of history does not mean what I have said, namely the mental reflex (Gedankenreflex) of economic conditions in the social consciousness, then it can mean nothing at all except the insipid truth that to human existence and action there belongs a material foundation. Applied to the individual, it would sound roughly like this: If the poet has nothing to eat, he stops writing poetry. But this phrase, so rich in content, would contribute little to explaining the poetic qualities of a Shakespeare or a Goethe. I do not impute such higher idiocy to the comrades Kautsky, Mehring, and Plekhanov. Therefore I stay with my short definition, which seems to me to fit the ideas of Kautsky as I know them.

Bax alleged that Kautsky had argued in his history of socialism that the conflict over the communion celebration at the time of the Hussites was but a "cloak" for the real, class struggle. Bax found it wrong for "Neo-Marxists" to insist on a hidden influence by economic factors when a psychological explanation fully accounted for an event. He refused to admit having confused "historical development" with "all human life" or material conditions with material interests. To Bax it was a *petitio principii* to say that the way people made a living determined that politics would dominate the Ancient world but Catholicism the Middle Ages. "The argument has to do with whether the manner and means by which they won their living suffice to explain which role politics and Catholicism played—the one in the one period, the other in the other."<sup>11</sup> That Marxism as understood by Kautsky might relate social

<sup>10</sup>Ernest Belfort-Bax, "Synthetische contra neumarxistische Geschichtsauffassung," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 171-173. Compare Bax, *Outlooks From the New Standpoint*, pp. 133f.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 173-175.

evolution to intellectual change in something other than a simple causal fashion, Bax did not allow.

Bax still believed, despite Kautsky's joke about Münchhausen, that the psychological impulse was capable of evolving independently of material conditions. The latter, too, could change independently of the former. Bax insisted that he had not confused an inner psychological aspect (personal self-interest) with an outer force (material conditions) because he had not spoken of self-interest but rather of class interest, and the latter was an external element.<sup>12</sup>

On October 13 Kautsky wrote Bernstein for help against Bax, asking for a letter of Engels about Kautsky and Bernstein being the only ones capable of editing a fourth volume of *Capital*. Bernstein responded on October 14 that Kautsky should explain how with his reference to a private conversation Bax used Engels in an unacceptable manner. Bernstein promised a copy of part of Engels's letter concerning *Capital* volume four, and he reminded Kautsky of a statement by Engels in *Neue Zeit* about the *Forerunners of Modern Socialism*. The statement contained no allegation of misinterpreting historical materialism.<sup>13</sup>

Kautsky's next reply to Bax in *Neue Zeit* consisted of three long articles collectively titled, "What Will and Can the Materialist Conception of History Accomplish?" He began the first essay by describing what he found to be the general imprecision in Bax's arguments. Bax had accused Kautsky of saying that the communion issue was merely a cloak for the underlying class struggle in the Hussite wars, but Kautsky protested that he had not used the term "cloak" and that he had argued that the communion question was of major importance. To Kautsky, Bax still confused "material conditions" and "material interests." Kautsky asked,

Does Bax really not know what is to be understood by the material conditions of a society? These material conditions are the conditions of production—the word taken in its widest sense. How can one assert that for the materialist conception of history this is approximately the same as the material interests of classes and persons? Let the following consideration illustrate the difference between the two terms:

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 175-177.

<sup>13</sup>KK-EB October 13, 1896; EB-KK October 14, 1896.

In my opinion it is possible to explain from the Roman Empire's material conditions Christianity's turning away from earthly things and longing for death. It would be outrageous to look for a material interest behind the death wish!<sup>14</sup>

Kautsky found Bax equally confusing about just who held the "extreme materialism" he repudiated. Kautsky complained that Bax had postulated a conflict between Marx and his followers but then instead of documenting this contention had wished "to concede the entire personal question." Kautsky challenged Bax's claim that Engels found Kautsky "too schematic": "Unfortunately Bax did not give us the slightest hint whether these statements [of Engels] were oral or written, public or private, what they referred to, and most important of all--how they sounded." To Kautsky, confusion characterized Bax's articles; it limited purposeful discussion of Marx. It was Bax's lack of precision which led him to believe that the theory needed correction. Kautsky explained,

Almost every criticism of Marx's ideas begins with throwing together terms he separated, thus begins with a step backwards scientifically. Some mix up use value and exchange value, value and price, surplus value and profit, etc.; they find that Rodbertus said "just about," "in slightly different words" the same thing as Marx, talk of a Marx-Rodbertus value theory and destroy or "improve" this. Still others throw together the animal and social organisms, the laws of development that apply to society and those applying to the individual, and the like; they do not differentiate precisely between the existence of human beings and their consciousness, between the content of history and its superficial manifestations, between material interests and material conditions and thus easily arrive at "overcoming" Marx's one-sided theories and looking down with pity on those Marxists who have stubbornly clung to the "one-sided schema (Schablone)."

<sup>14</sup>Kautsky, "Was will und kann die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung leisten?" *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 214f.

To answer such critics, one merely needed to explain what Marx had actually said.<sup>15</sup>

In the second essay of his series, Kautsky sought to define the meaning of Marxism. To Kautsky an important part of the definition of historical materialism was its goal, what the method claimed to be able to do. As he interpreted it, the theory need not seek to account for "all of human life." Kautsky found Bax wrong to argue that everything developed in history. For example, human bodily functions like digestion did not evolve appreciably over time. But in any case, according to Kautsky, historical materialism sought to account only for that which changed from one historical period to the next and even then only for that which characterized groups. In other words, the method was concerned primarily with the temporal, not the eternal; and with the social, not the individual. Hence to Kautsky, it was foolish of Bax to think that historical materialism wished to explain the unique poetic characteristics of a Shakespeare or Goethe; this was not its task. Instead, it sought to explain the ideas they shared with their contemporaries. For an example Kautsky offered his own historical writing:

In my study on Thomas More I distinguish three factors which influenced his work. First of all, and this is the most important factor, the general social relations of his time and country, which can be traced back to economic conditions. Then the specific social milieu in which More developed, belonging to which are not only the special economic relations in which he lived but also the people with whom he associated whose particular ideas in turn can be ascribed to a variety of factors, the traditions he met with, the literature he had access to. Yet, all these elements still do not suffice to make More's work, his *Utopia* for example, fully understandable; in addition, More's personal character must be considered.

Historical materialism was important to understanding a given human being, but in the indirect sense that the uniqueness of the person

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 216f.

became clear only when the general characteristics of the age had been identified.<sup>16</sup>

For Kautsky the question of the role in history of ideas, the psychological drive, or the human spirit was closely associated with the question of the role of the individual human being; for to him ideas were processes in the human brain. Kautsky maintained that ideas and individuals did influence history, that nothing occurred without them:

Bax will be very surprised when I declare that I fully agree with the sentence he confronted me with: "Economic formations fashion history only in combination with the human spirit and will"; but I do not agree with him when he continues, "This says clearly that the neo-Marxist conception of history . . . [sic] is on the wrong track." Here Bax is searching for the Marxist conception of history, be it the new or the old one, on a road it has not taken at all.

To Kautsky, Bax's argument that reality was the interaction of the human spirit with material conditions contradicted Bax's other claim that the psychological drive and the material conditions could develop independently of one another. A "psychological drive which drives itself" was an impossibility (Unding). Kautsky added,

I gladly concede to Bax, however, that this applies to the economic conditions the same way as to the psychological

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 228-230. Kautsky's three levels of historical analysis are also stated in the Foreword to *Die Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus*; cited in Rudolf Walther, ". . . aber nach der Sündflut kommen wir und nur wir." "Zusammenbruchstheorie", *Marxismus und politisches Defizit in der SPD 1890-1914* (Frankfurt/M., 1981), pp. 24f.

Regarding Kautsky's insistence that current material conditions alone, not to mention just present economic interests, were insufficient to account for a person's thought or for the events of a particular period, see John H. Kautsky, "J. A. Schumpeter and Karl Kautsky. Parallel Theories of Imperialism," *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, II (May 1961), 126; and Karl Vorländer, "Kautsky als Philosoph," in *Karl Kautsky dem Wehrer und Mehrerer der Marx'schen Lehre zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag. Ein Sonderheft der "Gesellschaft"*, Rudolf Hilferding, ed. (Frankfurt/M., 1968), p. 20. This is a reprint of the Berlin 1932 ed.; the 1st ed. was Berlin 1924.

drive and that if the neo-Marxists were to assert that economic conditions develop "up to a certain degree" independently, without the intervention of spirit and will, it would be equally wrong as the corresponding assertion about the psychological drive. Here as there the total development, not just a part of it, rests on the reciprocal action of (to say it like Bax) outer and inner factors. One must have an almost mystical view of economic development in order to assume that it could take even the slightest step forward without the action of the human spirit.

As an example, Kautsky mentioned that economic development followed the growth of technology, which rested on discovery and invention. Here the human spirit was thoroughly involved.<sup>17</sup>

According to Kautsky, historical materialism did not deny the importance of the human spirit in history but rather understood its role differently. Instead of determining social-economic relationships, human thought tried to answer questions posed by them. The answers the human mind discovered altered the material conditions, but only in unexpected ways. The historical process could not be planned—an opinion Kautsky shared with Engels. Kautsky avowed,

The spirit moves society, but not as the master of economic relations, rather as their servant. They are the ones which set the tasks it has to solve at a given time; they are the ones which provide it with the means to a solution. Therefore they are also the ones which determine the results which the spirit can and must reach under given historical circumstances. The next result the spirit reaches with the solution of one of its tasks may be intended and anticipated by it. But each of these solutions must engender results which the spirit could not anticipate and which often directly contradict its intentions. Economic development is the product of reciprocal interaction between economic relations and the human spirit, but it is not the product of a human activity which freely and methodically shapes economic relations according to its wishes.

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<sup>17</sup>Kautsky, "Was will und kann?" pp. 230f.



Kautsky continued that changes in the mode of production challenged the human spirit to bring about a corresponding alteration in the social structure. In early human history, this adaptation was unplanned. But with greater control over nature, human beings became more and more able to respond consciously to economic development. Kautsky summarized, "[Thus] the more social change ceases to be purely a product of instinct, the more it is mediated by ideas, by goals people set for themselves, and finally by systematic research."<sup>18</sup>

Kautsky provided several examples of how economic conditions influenced human thought. He said that Bax had overlooked reflection on society and its underlying structure as an important part of philosophy. The philosophical study of nature presupposed a degree of technological progress, a certain independence from nature. Technology provided the measuring instruments needed to conduct research. Economic conditions shaped the standpoint from which the social or natural scientist approached a particular question. Kautsky explained,

Despite all individual differences the viewpoint with which the mass of the members of a specific class approaches a specific question is still essentially a given one, and thereby the direction in which it seeks an answer to the question is also determined for it. The viewpoint, however, can be traced back to the current economic conditions of the society; by these are given not only the problem and the only direction in which it can be solved but also the different directions in which different classes and social strata seek the solution.

Kautsky asserted that up to the present, at least, the truth was more readily accessible to classes whose interests fit the historical process, though the initially unintended solution to each significant social question finally emerged in the conflict of interests and opinions.<sup>19</sup>

Kautsky had insisted that the human spirit or ideas could move history only because the individual person did have a role in historical change. He added,

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 231f. Compare earlier, 22-30.

<sup>19</sup>Kautsky, "Was will und kann?" pp. 233-235.

Here we have arrived at the point from which we can see to what extent the individual can influence the development of society. The individual cannot invent new problems for society, even though a person is sometimes capable of recognizing problems where others have until then perceived nothing mysterious. In solving these problems, the individual is tied to the means which the age provides. On the other hand, the choice of the problems individuals pay attention to, the standpoint from which they approach the solution, the direction in which they pursue it, and finally the force which they give it cannot without reservation be traced back solely to economic conditions; alongside these, individuals themselves make an impact through the specific way in which they developed thanks to the specific character of their talents and the specific character of the particular relations in which they found themselves.

All these circumstances just mentioned have an influence, if not on the direction of development at least on its path, on the manner and means by which the finally inevitable result comes about. And in this respect single individuals can give much, very much to their age.

In an implicit answer to Kanner, Kautsky pointed out that a type of person who could influence history was the intellectual, to the extent one had escaped "class narrow-mindedness." Admittedly, a proletarian might also be ignorant of the actual needs of the age. Kautsky allowed a key place for individual artists and politicians. Some military generals had made major contributions to the advance of history. Kautsky believed that social democrats should overcome their populist-democratic hesitation to respect individual leaders. Likewise they needed to admit that social democracy fought particular people, not just abstract institutions; capitalism could not be ended without expropriating capitalists. Kautsky wrote, "The materialist conception is not fatalistic. Only in struggle, in struggle against the enemy nature, the enemy people, the enemy class, the enemy opinion, the enemy individual does development occur." According to Kautsky, the person seeking to portray the details of the past must look at individuals. But for this purpose the materialist conception of history was insufficient,

and research into the historical development became an art instead of a science.<sup>20</sup>

Kautsky concluded his second article by summarizing what Marxism meant to him:

We now see clearly what it can and will achieve. It starts with the premise that the evolution of society and the dominant views within it proceed according to law and that we must look for the driving force and the final cause of this evolution in the development of economic conditions. To each specific stage of development of economic conditions correspond certain forms of society and ideas. To explore these laws and connections is the most important and basic task of historical research. Once the task is completed, it becomes comparatively easy to understand the specific forms of evolution in a specific case.

In this sense I interpret historical materialism; and if I have not completely misunderstood Marx and Engels, the interpretation fits their thought entirely.<sup>21</sup>

The passage is significant, perhaps, as much for what it omits as for what it includes about the meaning of Marxism to Kautsky at the end of the nineteenth century. One finds no description of the ideal order; no prediction of how future change would necessarily occur; no metaphysical speculation on the motion of matter; no epistemology about ideas being the reflection of economic interests; no Utilitarian ethic; no theory of the revolutionary party. For Kautsky, Marxism provided no global philosophy, no complete picture of reality. Rather, it was a method of research into the relationship between social-economic structure and culture, seeking to explain why both evolved over time and to understand the general historical context of specific ideas, incidents, and people.

Kautsky's third essay in the series dealt more with historical research and writing. He maintained that theory made possible empirical research, that without a theory the scholar would become mired in countless details. On the other hand, the discovery of new facts could eventually spark a new theory:

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 235-237.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 237f.

A new theory can come about only when particular new facts become known or those known before are seen in a new light, facts which are so noticeable and characteristic that at a given level of scientific thought they push at least a genius to a new understanding. By generalizing the laws so discovered, we arrive at a new theory.

Accordingly, it was senseless to criticize a given theory for its adherents having not yet treated all the relevant events. Kautsky's argument here may bring to mind his own response to the discovery that small-scale production in agriculture was not declining as expected: He had wished to analyze the phenomenon using the Marxist method; he had not dismissed Marxism simply because it had not yet accounted for the phenomenon. Kautsky continued against Bax that the number of problems yet unsolved by a given theory reflected its youth and the number and resources of its adherents, not its correctness. The real test of a theory of history came in the actual practice of writing history. Was the theory at least as useful as any other in explaining the facts?<sup>22</sup>

To illustrate his position, Kautsky turned to Bax's challenge concerning the history of Greek philosophy. Kautsky first explained how the forces which Bax saw causing the decline in Greek philosophy and art were inadequate to have done so. The specified racial mixing in Greece occurred only long after the decline in the fourth century BCE. In any case, Kautsky warned against overemphasizing racial characteristics. For Bax to talk of "spiritual exhaustion" causing the fall of Greek philosophy and art was meaningless to Kautsky, because the first was only a figurative name for the second. The biological analogy between the Greek spirit's growing older and an organism's aging was unclear; for one thing, a nation's spirit might become younger, as did that of France at the end of the eighteenth century. Bax himself attributed to the Greeks' loss of independence and to the influence of Christianity merely an acceleration of the Greek spiritual decline, not its cause, Kautsky observed. So finally Bax identified no cause at all for the change.<sup>23</sup>

Kautsky then presented the approach he would have pursued to explain the decline of Greek philosophy. It required looking at the earlier Golden Age, too. Kautsky told how the Greek victory over the

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 260f.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 262f.

Persians shifted trade to the western coast of the Aegean Sea. Athens rose as a commercial center. Wealth flowed into the city and provided numerous opportunities for artists and thinkers. In addition, the economic revolution had been rapid; success had occurred very dramatically; and Athens already possessed a rich heritage, including democracy. Philosophers could also ponder the changing social structure and the ramifications of the change. According to Kautsky, in the Greek countryside slaves replaced peasants; migration to the city and social inequality were followed by moral decay; greed supplanted communal identity. Then war exhausted Greece; trade routes shifted; Greece lost its economic importance. Before continuing to another question posed by Bax, on English Puritanism, Kautsky summarized,

In ascent and also in descent the economic development takes the lead and the intellectual development follows faithfully. The connection between the two is too tight, however, for the *post hoc* not to be a *propter hoc* also.<sup>24</sup>

When Bax later attacked on specific points, Kautsky countered by focusing on what for him was the most important issue: Bax had still misunderstood Marxism because he still wanted a global philosophy able to account for each detail of reality. Bax confused two categories of causes. In Kautsky's interpretation, the primary purpose of historical materialism was not to identify those causes giving each individual event its specific form; instead, the method tried to understand the laws underlying a group of phenomena. Historical materialism found the final cause of a society's development in the evolution of economic conditions. Kautsky pointed out that Marx himself had distinguished the underlying economic Basis's determining a social structure from the Basis's bearing countless variations because of varying conditions, which required empirical study. Kautsky insisted,

To divorce the "hidden Basis" of the total social process from the "innumerable empirical circumstances" which determine its manifestations at a specific time, this is the main difficulty which everyone must overcome who wants to do justice to the materialist conception of history.

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 264-266.

Kautsky repeated that economic factors alone were insufficient for explaining the specific form of a particular phenomenon on the "surface" of a society.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from arguing that Bax had fundamentally misunderstood Marxism, Kautsky exposed what he judged to be two fallacies among Bax's arguments. On the one hand, Bax saw Kautsky defeated because he could not supply a materialist history of philosophy. Kautsky replied,

Bax's challenge to me reminds me of that of Cuvier, who demanded of Lamarck that he identify for him a transitional form between the Paläotherium and the modern horse and when Lamarck was unable to do so declared the theory of evolution abolished. Later, to be sure, the transitional form was found in the Hipparion. Still there are people who use the same tactic and, for example, want to hear nothing of Darwinism until the transitional form between human beings and their animal ancestors has been found.

Kautsky protested that he had suggested a connection from material conditions to natural and social philosophy but that Bax thought the key problem of philosophy was epistemology. Kautsky claimed that epistemology too was related to material factors. On the other hand, Bax still seemed to contradict himself by saying that the human spirit and the material conditions were inseparable and then also saying that the latter evolved almost independently. For Kautsky, the evolution of material conditions was not a mechanical process. He vehemently denied that material conditions could change without the intervention of human spirit. Kautsky asked,

What are economic relations? On the one hand relations between human beings and nature, on the other hand relations among human beings, but always relations of human beings. And these are supposed to be able to develop without human beings acting! Even to be "almost capable of comprehending" this idea is a crass product of that fetishism

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<sup>25</sup>Kautsky, "Utopistischer und materialistischer Marxismus," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 716-718. Ernest Belfort-Bax, "Die Grenzen der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-1897), 676-687.



which sees in the relations of people the relations of things. An economic relation cannot exist for one second without "intervention of the conscious human spirit." Only through spirit do these relations arise, continue, and develop, which however does not mean to say that they always or even often correspond to the "conscious human spirit." But that again is another chapter.<sup>26</sup>

With the last remark Kautsky perhaps again referred to Engels's view that individuals make history but the conflict of their wills produces an unplanned result. Kautsky's articles against Bax constituted another defense of Marxism as understood by Kautsky and Bernstein in the mid-1890's against its interpretation by Bax and the SDF.

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<sup>26</sup>Kautsky, "Utopistischer und materialistischer Marxismus," 718-722.

### C. Social Democracy and the Fabians

Though Bax initially assaulted the historical materialism of Kautsky in the Vienna paper *Die Zeit*, Kautsky answered in *Neue Zeit*, commenting that he felt it inappropriate to debate in a "bourgeois" journal an issue disputed among socialists. The remark again raised the question of whether social democrats considered the term "bourgeois" pejorative, and Kanner replied on September 12 in an editorial, "Socialist Protestants." Kanner alleged that Kautsky had impugned Bax not only for what he said but also for where he said it. Kanner denied that *Die Zeit* was "bourgeois" in the sense of being an enemy of socialism. He charged that *Neue Zeit* was as bourgeois as *Die Zeit*. For the Stuttgart publication appeared in a capitalist country, was printed by wage laborers, and employed writers and editors who were middle-class intellectuals.<sup>1</sup>

Kanner insisted that there was an alternative to being either a social democrat or a pro-capitalist bourgeois. He asserted that his group represented in politics democracy and in economics the attempt to protect the weak and to socialize the economy. He continued,

We differ from the social-democratic leaders solely in that we do not pretend to be something other than what we and what they too actually are, namely bourgeois; in that we, unlike them, do not disguise ourselves as revolutionary proletarians in order to frighten peaceful citizens, because we believe we can impress these people more seriously with a different approach; and finally in that we reject as unscientific their vague ideas about a sudden revolutionary collapse of the capitalist economic system, the new establishment of a utopian future state, and the healing of all human suffering. With all historical veneration for Marx and Engels, we believe that even their ideas were not the last word in history but rather products of the time which have been surpassed repeatedly during fifty years of peaceful development and in any case are as much subject to free scientific criticism as any other scientific study.

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<sup>1</sup>Kautsky, "Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," p. 652. Heinrich Kanner, "Socialistische Protestanten," *Die Zeit*, September 12, 1896, p. 162. Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 216f. note 12a.

According to Kanner, the "free, critical socialism" of his group had better prospects than social democracy because "critical socialism" could modify its ideas to reflect new historical experiences and because it was not bound to a party of the uneducated masses.<sup>2</sup>

Kanner implied that Kautsky had to deny this alternative. Kanner alleged that Protestants who left the Roman Catholic Church had once in the past been accused of being heathens. He continued,

Herr Kautsky knows this very well, and perhaps he has already written many an eloquent word on the infamy of the Inquisition. Nevertheless he and people like him repeat the method of the Inquisition. They too, the true Ultramontanes of social policy, have their church, their saints, their church fathers, their priests, their dogmas; and whoever does not swear by these is a heathen—a bourgeois reactionary. For them there is no third position.

But Herr Kautsky knows very well, and he will not be able to keep it secret from his readers much longer, that the third position exists: one might call them, by way of comparison, the socialist Protestants. In the most advanced country of modern civilization, in model England, they have already rallied together under the name of "Fabians."

From the Fabian Report to the London Congress, Kanner quoted passages documenting the Fabians' stress on freedom of opinion, their critical position in regard to Marx and Lassalle, their relative impartiality toward the press in England, their opinion that the middle class should not be attacked as especially hostile to socialism, their view that often the laborers were narrow-minded, their refusal to use terms such as "middle class" or "bourgeois" in pejorative ways. Kanner maintained that according to Kautsky's thinking the Fabians were bourgeois frauds who should have been barred from the London Congress but that they were allowed to participate because in England social-democratic intolerance was weak. Kanner speculated that Fabian ideas would spread to the Continent and win people away from social democracy—from "the old, revolutionary socialism" as Shaw put it, according to Kanner. He challenged Kautsky to answer the Fabian

<sup>2</sup>Kanner, "Socialistische Protestanten," p. 162.

Report and a recent article by Shaw in *Cosmopolis*, excerpts of which appeared in *Die Zeit*.<sup>3</sup>

Those close to Kautsky shared his disgust with Kanner. From St. Gilgen, Luise Kautsky wrote her husband on September 13 that she had read the article with its attack on him. On September 14 Kautsky explained to her that he was writing his letter with interruptions, from thinking about Kanner. On September 16, he apologized,

That you did not receive a card yesterday is . . . Kanner's fault, whose [verbal] thrashing made me almost forget dinner and did make me miss the final mail collection. Even today you will receive only a postcard, for I am not yet done with the fellow.

Since Kanner had struck at Adler as well as at Kautsky, on September 12 the Austrian leader urged his friend to respond sharply, if possible in the *Arbeiterzeitung*: "You have certainly read Kanner's article, as perfidious as it is stupid. I am furious, and one must give the guy a good spanking." Kautsky answered on September 14 that a reply to Kanner was being prepared and on the 18th that it was being sent.<sup>4</sup>

Of greater significance for social-democratic intellectual history, however, was the exchange of views between Kautsky and Bernstein precipitated by Kanner's reference to the Fabians and Shaw. No doubt it perturbed Kautsky that he and Bernstein were forever being accused of using slogans, assuming a violent upheaval, wishing to construct a utopia overnight, and refusing to recognize facts that might contradict some alleged dogma. Kautsky complained to Bernstein on September 21,

The most revolting aspect of the affair is that we Marxists always get blamed for Liebknecht's phrases. L. causes immense damage. If things do not improve soon at *Vorw.*, I feel like . . . launching a pronouncement against L. in the

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 162f. Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 213 note 10.

<sup>4</sup>Luise Kautsky to Karl Kautsky September 13, 1896; and Karl Kautsky to Luise Kautsky September 14 and 16, 1896; in Kautsky Family Papers, IISH. Adler to Kautsky September 12, 1896; and Kautsky to Adler September 14 and 18, 1896, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 213-215.

NZ. and protesting against having German social democracy identified with L. L. compromises Marxism . . . even more than Hyndman because his reputation, and maybe also his flippancy, is greater.

Yet, Kautsky wrote, for the masses Liebknecht remained "the Marxist." On September 23 Bernstein responded that Kanner was terrible to say what he did, that he was wrong to drag in the Fabians. Kautsky could answer that Bax opposed the Fabians. Bernstein pointed out that he had already written on the Fabians in the English movement, in a note to the MacDonald article, and that the article showed that the "socialist Protestants" did appear in *Neue Zeit*. Bernstein promised Kautsky a copy of Shaw's *Cosmopolis* essay and expressed the opinion that the criticism of the SPD made sense if one realized that it was a response to Liebknecht.<sup>5</sup>

In his *Neue Zeit* reply to Kanner, Kautsky first explained his use of the attribute "bourgeois" to describe *Die Zeit*: He had meant no dishonor. A bourgeois politician was one serving the interests of bourgeois society, based on commodity production. Kautsky continued,

A bourgeois politician thus is not, as Kanner maintains, necessarily a representative of capitalist interests. He can very well represent the interests of the small bourgeoisie and the peasantry, yes, even the interests of the workers, if he wants to support them merely in the better use of their labor power and not as a revolutionary factor called to replace commodity production with social production.<sup>6</sup>

Then, Kautsky presented the Fabians as a model for Kanner to follow. After all, the Fabians had called for socialization of the means

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<sup>5</sup>KK-EB September 21, 1896; part of this passage is also quoted in Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Zur Ideologie der Partei vor dem 1. Weltkrieg* (Hanover, 1967), p. 15 note 16. EB-KK September 23, 1896; EB-KK October 5, 1896. In the last letter Bernstein remarked about *Vorwärts*'s October 1 article on municipal socialism, "The standard for *Vorwärts* is pure utopianism."

For Bernstein's note to the MacDonald article, see earlier, 157f.

<sup>6</sup>Kautsky, "Die feige Invektive eines sozialdemokratischen Schimpfblattes," *Neue Zeit*, XIVb (1896), 811-813.

of production, they had campaigned for socialist candidates, and they had promoted socialist ideas. Kautsky observed that their tactic of permeation arose from conditions in England. He wrote,

The cause of the weakness in socialist organization is found by the Fabians, on the one hand, in the limited intellect of the English laborers, who in contrast to their colleagues on the Continent lack a wider view; but on the other hand and primarily, in the wrong tactics of the organized socialists, who appear too sectarian. The [Shaw's] criticism of social-democratic tactics which Kanner publishes in his article with such pleasure is directed primarily not against Continental social democracy but rather against English socialists, especially against the Social Democratic Federation of which Belfort Bax is one of the most highly regarded members, the same Bax whose outstanding capabilities Kanner cannot praise enough. . . .

On the other side the Fabians find that the bourgeoisie in England is more farsighted than the one on the Continent and that particularly in the Radical party many elements are ripe to be won over to socialist ideas, even more so because the party—a bourgeois party, respectfully stated—depends more and more on workers' votes and has to gear its tactics more and more toward representing the workers' interests. It is all the more important to influence the Radical party since it constitutes a major power. It has already been a governing party and will be so again. Thus there is the possibility in the foreseeable future of its realizing what it wants.

The Fabians begin with these premises. I do not wish to explore at this point whether the Fabians do not do too much of a good thing in the one direction just as the Social Democratic Federation does in the other. Still, their viewpoint is certainly comprehensible and based on the actual circumstances; and in any case, whether or not their success corresponds to the effort put forth, their activity is in the interest of socialism.

Like Bernstein, Kautsky suspected that the Fabians might have gone too far in their reaction against the SDF's utopianism; but by and large, the fact remains that the leading Marxist theoretician immediately after



Engels's death sympathized with Fabianism in England. On October 1, 1896, Kautsky wrote, "I personally stand less opposed to the Fabians than, for example, Bebel does and Engels did, at least at the time of my sojourn in London. In regard to them I take the same standpoint as Bernstein."<sup>7</sup>

However, Kautsky believed that the Fabian tactic would prove disastrous on the Continent. Austria possessed a strong social-democratic party, so there was no need for socialists to work outside it, Kautsky argued. There existed no large bourgeois democratic movement to permeate with socialist ideas. In Austria Fabianism would lead social democrats to a social-reformist democracy, not Radicals to socialism.<sup>8</sup>

In the editorial "Little Upstarts," on September 26, Kanner denied that Shaw's remarks in *Cosmopolis* were not directed at the Continental social democrats; he cited Shaw's explicit reference to the SPD. Kanner charged that Kautsky refused to fight the Fabians because his Marxist position was outdated and incapable of accounting for new phenomena like them. Kanner explained that he opposed socialization of the means of production because Austria was not politically ready for it. The country required further liberal reform, already accomplished in England. Shaw had said much the same for

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 814f. Kautsky's October 1 statement on the Fabians is quoted in Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," to *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky, Jr., ed. (Assen, 1971), p. xxxii.

Compare Kautsky to Adler on March 21, 1899: "I always had sympathy for the English Fabians because they are people who accomplish something and the Hyndman-Bax revolution reminiscences do not fit England." Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 304. Kautsky's approval of the Fabians is recognized by Bo Gustafsson, *Marxismus und Revisionismus. Eduard Bernsteins Kritik des Marxismus und ihre ideengeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*, Holger Heide, tr. (Frankfurt/M., 1972), p. 133.

<sup>8</sup>Kautsky, "Die feige Invektive eines sozialdemokratischen Schimpfblattes," 815-817. Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 214f. note 12.

German social democracy, Kanner believed. He asked why reform work was all right if the Fabians did it, but not if he did.<sup>9</sup>

Actually, Kautsky had not faulted Kanner for seeking liberal-democratic reforms but rather had challenged him to be like the Fabians in seeking socialist ones. Because in England bourgeois democrats had accomplished the appropriate political reforms, the Fabians could proceed with economic ones. In a final reply to Kanner in *Neue Zeit*, Kautsky made the significant observation that Kanner had mistakenly confused the Fabians with the English Radicals and had wrongly identified the strengthening of social-democratic organization with the spread of socialist ideas. Kautsky, like Bernstein, accepted neither association.<sup>10</sup>

In the meantime Kautsky had received a copy of Shaw's *Cosmopolis* article, "Socialism at the International Congress," the irony of which struck Kautsky. For example, Shaw began,

An International Socialist Congress that everybody laughs at and nobody fears is a gratifying step in advance. The world is becoming familiar with Socialism. I, the Socialist, am no longer a Red Spectre: I am only a ridiculous fellow. Good: I embrace the change. It puts the world with me; and henceforth I shall be as amiably indulged and as unconcernedly listened to as any other politician.

To Shaw, it was good to make many impossible demands, for then a few practical ones might be achieved. He claimed that among those socialists the most upset by the disturbances at the London Congress were those wishing to proceed with business. Shaw thought that the key questions of the Congress were

how far the preachers of a once safely negligible millennial sect have at last learned real politics and come into the field

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<sup>9</sup>Heinrich Kanner, "Kleine Gernegroße," *Die Zeit*, September 26, 1896, pp. 194f.

<sup>10</sup>Kautsky, "Kleine Gernegroße," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 58-60.

with a practicable program; and second, how far such a program is likely to gain electoral support.<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, England was closest to socialism, Shaw judged. In Germany socialists might have a strong party, but they still needed to win political freedom and to implement basic liberal reforms. Shaw observed that in England the middle classes ruled, that liberal reforms were accomplished, and that there existed powerful trade unions, a central government able to confront capitalist enterprises, and local governments capable of running collective production. However, the existence of a strong socialist party backed by the votes of a "class conscious" proletariat did not accompany this advanced stage. In Shaw's opinion, it was simply not the English way of doing things. He wrote,

Cromwell said that the man who goes furthest is the man who does not know whither he is going; and it is perhaps an instinctive sense of the truth of this that makes an Englishman object so intensely to understand [sic] his own policy, or to complicate his calculation as to the effect of his next step by any consideration as to the next step but one. He has already led the world by taking many steps on the road to Social-Democracy; and there is no doubt that he will take the rest. But he will take them one by one. And he will never be a Socialist--not even when he gets there.

Shaw believed that when the occasional Englishman did become deliberately a socialist, he became sectarian.<sup>12</sup>

Shaw regretted that such sectarian, "class-conscious" socialists had dominated the British delegation to the London Congress. He charged,

. . . the Social-Democratic Federation presented itself to the Congress as a sect rallying round its favourite preacher, Mr. H. M. Hyndman, basing its claims to consideration on its inflexible principles, its propaganda conducted indoors and

<sup>11</sup>G. Bernard Shaw, "Socialism at the International Congress," *Cosmopolis*, III (September 1896), 658-662. KK-EB October 7, 1896.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 662-664.

out, rain and shine, in season and out of season, on its devotion, its martyrdoms, and its hands unsullied by the compromises of political parties.

Shaw criticized Hyndman:

He takes his stand upon "the Bible of the Working Classes," [i.e., on *Capital*] and disposes of all objections by keeping the minds of his congregation fixed on the hell of Capitalism and the heaven of Socialism. He quite openly invests the realization of Socialism with the attributes of the heavenly life, and speaks and writes with unfeigned horror and disgust of those Socialists who assume that men under Socialism will still compete with one another to secure the favourable opportunities in life, . . .<sup>13</sup>

Shaw presumed that Hyndman and the SDF gained stature through their association with Liebknecht and the SPD. Yes, Shaw conceded, Liebknecht shared Hyndman's Marxism, but in practice events had forced Liebknecht and the SPD to follow another course. They had condemned anarchism, had abandoned barricade fighting for voting, had once supported the Catholic Center Party in a Reichstag election. Here Shaw suggested that a profound contradiction had arisen between the SPD's Marxist theory and its reformist practice. He wrote,

Unfortunately, they [the SPD] are still dominated by the old revolutionary tradition; and instead of assuring the normal world that they have come to their senses, they nervously reassure the revolutionary sects that they are as mad as ever. Liebknecht still covers every compromise by a declaration that the Social-Democrats never compromise; he still dares not throw any of the old follies overboard without announcing that those who allege that the Social-Democrats have gone back from "their principles" are lying; he still implies that when the red flag goes up for the final battle between the proletariat and the exploiter, the old soldiers of the Revolution will be ready.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 665f. James W. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London. A Study of Five Unorthodox Socialists* (Oxford, 1970), p. 137, summarizes Shaw's attack on the thinking of Hyndman and Liebknecht.

Shaw warned that the discrepancy had begun to harm the SPD. It alienated the younger, better trained people; and it lessened the party's influence in Germany.<sup>14</sup>

Shaw quoted extensively from the Fabian Report to the London Congress. The document offended against key assumptions held by the SDF. The Fabians wished to act only within the English constitution using customary political means, expected no sensational social transformation, questioned innovations like the referendum, and anticipated private firms continuing in a mixed economy. Here were the Fabian ideas on Marx, the press, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat which Kanner had cited against Kautsky. The Report stated that the Fabian Society did not support the abolition of wages, the equalization of pay and hours, the granting of authority to everyone. Shaw remarked that the Fabian position was anathema to the SDF but that it should not be so to the SPD:

Their tactics have long since been Fabianized by mere force of circumstances; but they have not ventured to avow this, and have studied the art of giving an extreme and catastrophic air to very ordinary and harmless proposals, rather than, like the Fabians, taking the fullest advantage of the facility with which important changes can be slipped through as matters of mere routine and detail, and new measures foisted upon the program of any established political party. . . . Still, political experience has made the German party so far opportunist and constitutional, that the Fabian report represents them better than the Impossibilism of the Social-Democratic Federation [does].<sup>15</sup>

To Shaw the London Congress demonstrated that socialists were mastering practical politics. Parliamentary leaders like Jaurès and Vandervelde dominated the meeting, it expelled the anarchists, and the SPD showed moderation. Shaw wrote,

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<sup>14</sup>Shaw, "Socialism at the International Congress," pp. 666-668. Hans-Holger Paul, *Marx, Engels und die Imperialismustheorie der 2. Internationale* (Hamburg, 1978), p. 127, sees Shaw as one of the first clearly to identify this alleged discrepancy. Gustafsson, pp. 158f., also includes summary of Shaw's article.

<sup>15</sup>Shaw, "Socialism at the International Congress," pp. 668-671.

When the Chairman of the Technical Education Board of the London County Council made a practical suggestion for securing secondary education to poor scholars, and Mr. Keir Hardie promptly moved an impossible amendment to give free education and maintenance to everybody up to the age of 21, the Germans, the Belgians, the Danes, the Austrians and the Swiss voted with Mr. Sidney Webb and against Mr. Hardie.

The Keir Hardie amendment passed anyway; and other mistakes occurred, according to Shaw, especially that of overestimating the proletariat. The socialists, he concluded,

still see the social problem, not sanely and objectively, but imaginatively, as the plot of a melodrama, with its villain and its heroine, its innocent beginning, troubled middle, and happy ending. They are still the children and the romancers of politics.<sup>16</sup>

Bernstein had recommended Shaw's article to Kautsky when it appeared in early September. Now that he had finally read it, Kautsky discovered that he appreciated both the humor and the accurate insights. Yet, Kautsky was thoroughly frustrated by what he found to be Shaw's ignorance of Marxism and his identifying the theory with the ideas of Liebknecht and the SDF. Kautsky wrote Bernstein,

When I . . . told Engels that I had aimed my book about population increase really against Liebknecht, he laughed gigantically that one could take L. seriously as a theoretician. Shaw . . . seems in this respect to be today where I was 15 years ago and of all the German Marxist literature to know only a few articles by Liebknecht. The latter is a nuisance.

What the Fabians say against Sd., in essence the two of us, and before us . . . Marx and Engels, have already said innumerable times; but it is ignored by our own people. We

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 671-673. On the resolution concerning education, see above, 211f.



are the priests of Marx, and we are blamed for all that we battle against.<sup>17</sup>

Kautsky had fought for many of the principles Shaw supported and against many of the ideas Shaw opposed. For example, Kautsky had rejected the notions of abolishing the wage system, of sudden socialization of an economy, of refusing to cooperate with other classes and parties. Shaw exemplified the confusion over the meaning of Marxism which Kautsky and Bernstein were struggling to end.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>KK-EB October 7, 1896; EB-KK September 7, 1896.

<sup>18</sup>For opinions of Kautsky on these various topics, see earlier, 44f., 50-52, 75f. About the allegation of a split of theory vs. practice in the SPD, see Hans Georg Lehmann, *Die Agrarfrage in der Theorie und Praxis der deutschen und internationalen Sozialdemokratie. Vom Marxismus zum Revisionismus und Bolschewismus* (Tübingen, 1970), p. xiii note 2 and p. 273 note 9.

#### D. The "Problems of Socialism" Series Begins

In a September 1, 1896, letter to Kautsky, Bernstein apologized for taking so long with a review of Hyndman's *Economics of Socialism*. Bernstein felt that the critique needed to expose Hyndman's compromising Marxism and that it gave opportunity to think through some troublesome questions. He wrote, "I do not want to finish H. off with a few phrases, because his book provides a good chance to make timely comments regarding several problems of socialism." Bernstein proposed three more articles for the fall of 1896 to discuss such issues. He envisioned the series clearly enough by September 14 that he could tell Kautsky to announce it.<sup>1</sup>

The date is significant: Bernstein was completing his review of Hyndman's economics; Kautsky was debating Bax on historical materialism; Kanner had just compared Kautsky unfavorably to the Fabians; the battle with Liebknecht over Turkey was beginning. Bernstein's "Problems of Socialism" originated in the middle of a joint effort by Kautsky and Bernstein to defend mature Marxism against various interpretations by Hyndman, Bax, and Liebknecht; and the articles contributed to this defense. On the one hand, the series emphasized a careful study of the evolution of material conditions toward socialism in order to find social and political demands appropriate to a given stage of development. On the other hand, the series attacked a utopian thinking which insisted on the collapse of capitalism and the sudden establishment of a new order.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>EB-KK September 1, 1896; EB-KK September 14, 1896. The review is Bernstein, "Sozialistische Oekonomie in England," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 46-54. Bernstein faulted Hyndman for ignoring the third volume of *Capital* and the later economic writing of Engels. In Bernstein's opinion, Hyndman was influenced too much by utopianism, not Marxism, in his picture of the transition to socialism.

<sup>2</sup>Summaries and alternative interpretations of the "Probleme" series are found in Gustafsson, pp. 101-103 and 171-176; Thomas Meyer, *Bernsteins konstruktiver Sozialismus. Eduard Bernsteins Beitrag zur Theorie des Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1977), pp. 149-155; Pierre Angel, *Eduard Bernstein et l'Evolution du Socialisme Allemand* (Paris, 1961), pp. 139-141; and Helmut Hirsch, "Introduction," in *Ein revisionistisches Sozialismusbild. Drei Vorträge von Eduard Bernstein*, Helmut Hirsch,

In the first article, "General Remarks on Utopianism and Eclecticism," Bernstein rejected the assumption that the SDF represented the socialist movement in England; to him its electoral failures did not reflect the actual strength of socialist tendencies there. Bernstein judged that in his *Cosmopolis* essay Shaw had correctly explained the incongruity. In England the economic and social preconditions of socialism, the "Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus," were more advanced than in Germany; but the bourgeois parties were more open to socialist demands, too; hence they better resisted the growth of a specifically socialist party. Significantly, in this particular use of the phrase which would later form part of the title of his most famous book, Bernstein referred to material conditions required as preconditions for socialism and not to theoretical presuppositions held by various socialists. Bernstein argued that even though one could not speak of nearing "the final victory of socialism" or "proletarian dictatorship," developments in the economy and also the spread of socialist ideas meant that advanced countries were approaching a situation of great proletarian influence. Social democrats should abandon their generally negative stand and come forward with more extensive positive proposals for reforms.<sup>3</sup>

Bernstein maintained that social democracy had overcome an older utopianism which devised detailed plans for a new society but that another kind of utopianism continued. While not making plans for a new order, it did hold dogmatically to a particular picture of future change—a leap into socialism—and characterized reforms preceding this as merely palliative, as "capitalistic." Bernstein wrote,

A big line is drawn: capitalist society here, socialist society there. One does not talk about systematic work in the former; one lives from hand to mouth and drifts with events. One overcomes all theoretical difficulties by appealing to a very one-sidedly conceived class struggle and to economic development.<sup>4</sup>

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ed. (Hanover, 1966), pp. 23f. Gustafsson, pp. 171-176, and Meyer, pp. 150f., observe a debt of Bernstein to the Fabians.

<sup>3</sup>Bernstein, "Allgemeines über Utopismus und Eklektizismus," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-1897), 164f.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 165f.

For Bernstein it was insufficient to propose whatever reform might win voters and for the rest leave tactical problems to the "class struggle," focusing all the while on the coming Kladderadatsch.

The utopian character of waiting for the "final victory of socialism" was not lessened by citing prooftexts from Marx and Engels. Bernstein said that scientific theory could lead to utopianism when its results were taken as dogma. In his opinion, it was wrong to pull out of context the passages in *Capital* on the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation, assuming for example that the "expropriation of the expropriators" meant a general sudden act following a catastrophe. Bernstein found this idea utopian:

For even though social catastrophes undoubtedly can, and probably will, greatly accelerate the course of development, they nevertheless cannot create overnight the kind of uniformity of conditions which would be required for a simultaneous transformation of the economy and which at any rate does not yet exist today. In the meantime, the world does not stand still. Certain branches of production or departments mature to a condition where it becomes inefficient if not harmful to the general needs of society to leave them to private exploitation. Parallel to this the influence of the working class and of the political organizations which represent it is growing, without one yet being able to speak of a Dictatorship of the Proletariat. It becomes inevitable that questions will be placed on the agenda which according to this [utopian] view belong after the catastrophe.

According to Bernstein, for one to label such reform efforts "state capitalism" was utopian and unscientific since one argued from a model of some future order instead of considering actual material conditions, social development, and political systems. Rising proletarian influence on the government meant that state-managed production could serve the people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 166f. Kautsky had already developed both arguments that partial socialization could benefit present society and that a uniform, total socialization was unlikely. That social democrats should not use expectation of an imminent Kladderadatsch as an excuse for inaction was Bernstein's insight in debates on the suffrage in Saxony

In Bernstein's opinion, the use of slogans like "state capitalism" had led to an "unrestrained eclecticism"—by which he apparently meant proposing reforms without relating them to social-economic development. To him, reform became a matter of guesswork and accident when based not on an analysis of social development but on an imagined social condition. In contrast, he found the Fabians consciously eclectic, a reaction against the sectarian utopian socialism of the early 1880's. Bernstein remarked that the Fabians based their proposals on realistic criteria, and that they often reached results not unlike those reached by a Marxist analysis, but that they erred, nonetheless, because their work lacked the unity of a theory. Like Engels, Bernstein could acknowledge the Fabians' presumed accomplishments on practical, individual issues, while still pointing to their supposed failure as theoreticians. Bernstein continued that many persons had seen the weakness. However, critics had responded only with personal vindictive, generalities, and slogans and not with further development of Marxism. The critics had even ignored corrections Marx and Engels themselves made to their theory.<sup>6</sup>

Bernstein reported that recently a new group had formed in Great Britain to fight eclecticism. Radicals and socialists around *The Progressive Review* called upon all who recognized that democratic progress could be accelerated and improved. An introductory statement included the words:

"Careful study of the laws of how social forces form and interact will contribute to freeing progressive movements from the suspicion of blind opportunism which burdens them today, from irrational compromising, and from chasing after utopias and will contribute to establishing a more reliable and scientific basis for social action."

Bernstein presented John A. Hobson's inaugural essay as a declaration of war on eclecticism—particularly that of progressives like the Fabians. Hobson knew that disillusionment with utopianism had prompted some reformers to reject theory. Nonetheless their neglect of

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and in Prussia and on Polish independence and the Ottoman Empire. See earlier, pp. 43, 182f., 230.

<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, "Allgemeines über Utopismus und Eklektizismus," pp. 167f.

theory and their belief in progress through single experiments had dearly cost the socialist cause.<sup>7</sup>

For the second article in his "Problems of Socialism" series, "A Theory About the Place and Limits of Collectivism," Bernstein translated Hobson's essay. On the one hand, it tacitly attacked the Fabians by showing how reforms could be based on theory. On the other hand, it criticized two assumptions: (a) that the tendencies for capital to concentrate and centralize, replacing the middle classes, (processes portrayed in *Capital* volume one, in the *Anti-Dühring*, and in the Erfurt Program) were realized; and (b) that accordingly the economy was ready for total socialization. Hobson had reached much the same conclusion as Kautsky during the agrarian controversy: Development of capital in some areas of production might accompany people continuing to engage in small-scale, specialized, labor-intensive production elsewhere. These many small-scale producers could not be organized into effective large-scale production units, and politically they might prove an important force resisting socialism.<sup>8</sup>

Hobson challenged the assumption that the success of joint-stock companies in some industries implied the eventual socialization of all means of production and distribution. Those industries advancing most quickly to joint-stock companies and toward socialization embodied what Hobson called "routine production," characterized by uniformity in activity or by allowing for machinery. Routine production was in turn made possible by widespread demand for standard goods meeting common human needs. The best examples were the streets, railroads, and postal service, and then water and gas companies. Hobson speculated that someday public bakeries might supply bread. As living standards equalized, the number of routinely produced items would increase.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 168-171.

<sup>8</sup>See earlier, 91-93 and 204f.

<sup>9</sup>John A. Hobson, "Eine Theorie der Gebiete und Grenzen des Kollektivismus," Eduard Bernstein, tr., *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 204-206. In the *Anti-Dühring* Engels argued that joint-stock companies formed an important step in the social-economic evolution toward socialism. See *Marx-Engels Werke*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, ed. (Berlin, 1957ff.), XX, 258f.



However, Hobson proceeded, the tendency toward socialization confronted a counter-tendency. Human beings also desired individualized products to fit their particular tastes, and one could produce such goods only in a specialized manner. Most socialists taught that a person's self-awareness as an individual would increase under socialism, not diminish; so progress in meeting basic human needs would generate a demand for more individualized production, not less. According to Hobson, Ruskin had shown how many materials could be used in an artistic fashion. Hobson claimed that no example existed of individualized manufacture tending toward collective production. The tendency occurred less in these fields, for division of labor and application of machinery were not appropriate. Much production would remain small-scale.<sup>10</sup>

Hobson found in the English economist Alfred Marshall further support for the distinction between routine and individualized production. Hobson pointed out that according to Marshall more needs could be met by encouraging the production and consumption of articles strongly affected by the law of increasing returns. Such articles, Hobson maintained, were "routine products" of mass consumption made in routine and easily mechanized ways.<sup>11</sup>

Next Hobson contended that his distinction between routine and individualized production demanded a new attitude toward monopolies. Basically two types of monopoly existed, Hobson thought--those based on the superior economy of a larger firm and those resting on control of a limited source of supply. Hobson recognized the desire to socialize the former kind of monopoly, those manufacturing articles for mass consumption in a routine way under the law of increasing returns. However, these economic arguments did not reach identical results when applied to monopolies based on natural resources such as land. On some farms the law of increasing returns did pertain, Hobson observed; and these could be socialized. In other cases small-scale production was economically viable, and such farms could remain in private hands. For Hobson a correct policy on socialization could be two-fold--some firms being socialized and others not. On those under private ownership, an appropriate rent would be taken. Hobson denied

<sup>10</sup>Hobson, "Eine Theorie des Kollektivismus," pp. 206-209.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 209f.

that the policy would be a compromise. For the society would socialize that which it could usefully manage.<sup>12</sup>

Both Bernstein and Kautsky disagreed with Hobson. In remarks following Hobson's article, Bernstein commented that most "consumers" were producers buying a semi-finished commodity to alter for resale. They had little interest in purchasing individualized products, and so the area for routine industries was greater than Hobson anticipated. Still, Bernstein emphasized that small-scale production would continue for a long time. Like Kautsky, Bernstein believed that the very success of large-scale production created room for new forms of small-scale. Since he thought that society was not ready for full socialization, Bernstein recommended consideration of a mixed economy.<sup>13</sup>

Bernstein could think Hobson's insights compatible with Marx. Hobson had merely identified counter-forces to the tendencies for capital to concentrate and centralize, for the middle classes to disappear. In effect, he had reminded social democrats that in this regard *Capital*, the *Anti-Dühring*, and the Erfurt Program presented tendencies, not completed facts. Bernstein's greatest debt to Hobson was perhaps this reassurance that tendencies identified by Marx might be opposed (though not necessarily checked) by counter-forces.

To Adler, Kautsky expressed his opinion that Bernstein should have faulted the Fabians and Hobson for valuing the interests of consumers over those of producers. Socialism was concerned primarily with ending exploitation of the worker, not the consumer. However, in making this criticism Kautsky may have been motivated in part by a desire to console Adler, who after the conflict with Kanner had wanted Bernstein to attack the Fabians more strongly than Hobson had done.<sup>14</sup> Hobson's article did make socialization rest on evolving economic conditions, not on a utopian ideal. And the essay contained other ideas Kautsky accepted--the continuing existence of small-scale production in agriculture, the expansion of small-scale production in

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 210f. See also Angel, *Eduard Bernstein*, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup>Hobson, "Eine Theorie des Kollektivismus," pp. 212f. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 151, finds in Bernstein's comments a challenge to the Erfurt Program's identifying a tendency toward a simplification of the production process. But see also p. 286 in Meyer.

<sup>14</sup>Adler to Kautsky November 9, 1896; Kautsky to Adler November 12, 1896; in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 219f.

some branches of industry while capital developed in others, the need for a mixed economy (at least temporarily) in the future.

In its purpose the third article of the "Problems of Socialism" series, "The Present Condition of Industrial Development in Germany," resembled the second: Bernstein struck again at the premise that the current economic situation made total socialization practicable in the near future. However, Bernstein also warned against overestimating the economic significance of small-scale production; in this respect the third article sought to correct Hobson. Reviewing recent government statistics, Bernstein first affirmed a powerful tendency toward capital concentration in German industry. In terms of the number of people employed, small-scale production was still extensive; but many of the small enterprises listed by the government were actually economic subdivisions of large concerns, Bernstein believed. And the industrial worker was immensely more productive than the craftsman, so large-scale production already dominated the economy. The tendency toward capital concentration was appearing even in artistic production, as Hobson admitted. Still, Bernstein cautioned that the fact that large-scale manufacture was ever more important did not in itself mean that the large factories were ready for socialization.<sup>15</sup>

In his "Problems of Socialism" Bernstein neither favored the Fabians nor gave uncritical approval to Hobson. However, Bernstein did attack central ideas of the SDF. In doing so, Bernstein aided Kautsky in his battle against Bax.

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<sup>15</sup>Bernstein, "Der gegenwärtige Stand der industriellen Entwicklung in Deutschland," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 303-311.

### E. Belfort-Bax's Reply

During the summer and autumn of 1896, Ernest Belfort-Bax had suffered Kautsky's rebuke to his philosophy of history, Bernstein's criticism of SDF policies and assumptions, and especially Bernstein's rejection of the theory of colonialism which Bax had proffered during debates on South Africa. So in November 1896 Bax retaliated. While doing so he helped define key terms and issues of the Revisionist Controversy, including the accusation that Bernstein had abandoned social democracy for Fabianism.

In an article titled "Our German Fabian Convert; or Socialism according to Bernstein," which appeared in *Justice* on November 7, 1896, Bax disputed Bernstein's representing the SPD on the subject of colonialism and the extension of capitalism. Bax wrote,

In No. 4 of the new volume of the *Neue Zeit*, Bernstein favours us with some eight pages of the purest extract of Philistinism we have yet read from his pen anent the situation in Turkey, and the attitude of Socialists towards national risings. The statements contained in the aforesaid article resolve themselves into an allegation that only those risings deserve the sympathy of the Socialists which are likely to result in the expansion of capitalist civilisation!

To Bax there were at least three good reasons for resisting the spread of capitalism: (a) modern civilization was evil; (b) not all peoples needed to pass through the capitalist stage; and most importantly, (c) capitalism's expansion abroad might delay the imminent collapse of the present economic system. Hence, for Bax, socialists must fight the advance of civilization:

... while naturally desirous of removing any abuses incident to Turkish rule, we heartily support the maintenance of the Turkish Empire, as preserving, partially at least, a considerable chunk of humanity from the blessings of the world-market, the factory, Christianity, and the *höhere Kultur* generally. The same applies to the barbaric and savage communities of Africa upon whom the curse of civilisation

has not yet fallen. Their fight against the white man, against missions, traders, and settlers is our fight.<sup>1</sup>

Bax wished to protect native peoples from modern civilization in order to precipitate the collapse of capitalism. Bernstein, in contrast, considered modern civilization a relative good. He did not see an economic collapse required before proletarian rule and socialism; he feared that it might even postpone the achievement of socialism by delaying formation of the proletariat, creation of social wealth, and completion of the democratic republic. In any case, Bernstein apparently understood Marx to have implied that the expansion of capital abroad was inevitable so long as capitalism existed.<sup>2</sup>

It would seem that at this point neither side in the debate had clearly addressed the issue of national self-determination. Yes, Bax declared, "We recognise no rights, under any circumstances whatever, for a civilised power to subjugate races living in a lower stage of social development and to force civilisation upon them."<sup>3</sup> Yet, he condoned the Ottoman Empire's forestalling the aspirations of various subject peoples. Perhaps Bernstein failed to differentiate sufficiently between these subject nations moving autonomously toward bourgeois society and the imposition of capitalism by Europeans on Africa.

In his November *Justice* article, Bax complained that Bernstein did favor bourgeois nationalist movements like those in 1848. It was concerning the national question that Bernstein had, according to Bax, "sneered" at the "final triumph of socialism." Bernstein had explained that national independence was possible before socialism, as in the examples of Italy and Germany. Bax replied,

No, no, friend Bernstein, it is a little too late in the day to serve up the '48 swindles of national "freedom," "independence" and "unity" as an acceptable cold collation to the proletariat of modern Europe. Try something else! Happily, the feeling is growing among the working classes

<sup>1</sup>Ernest Belfort-Bax, "Our German Fabian Convert; or Socialism According to Bernstein," *Justice*, November 7, 1896, p. 6. Compare earlier, 38-41 and 171.

<sup>2</sup>See earlier, 41-43, 165, 172f.

<sup>3</sup>Bax, "Our German Fabian Convert," p. 6.

that all national aspirations are a fraud and a red herring designed to trick them out of following the true goal of international Socialism.<sup>4</sup>

In his article on Turkey, Bernstein had recognized national interest and patriotic feeling. But he did not identify this nationalism with chauvinism or find it incompatible with internationalism. Marx, Engels, Kautsky, and Luxemburg had supported certain national movements. In reference to the London Congress's response to the question of oppressed peoples, Bernstein had criticized the phrase "final victory of socialism," but as an empty excuse for inaction on an urgent issue.<sup>5</sup> Bax wrongly implied that Bernstein had abandoned international socialism in favor of a bourgeois nationalism and capitalism.

According to Bax, capitalism and socialism stood opposed antithetically to one another. Supposedly, Bernstein had looked for an intermediary stage, a "Vermittlung" (mediation). In search of it, he had allegedly turned to the Fabians, only then to abandon the socialist goal. Bax contended,

This is the real explanation of Bernstein's attitude. He has unconsciously ceased to be a Social-Democrat. [sic] The form, the empty party-hull, remains on him, but filled with a reactionary content. The process has been helped by his sojourn in this country.

With this Bax contributed to the view that Bernstein had abandoned Marxism for Fabianism. As an example of Bernstein's supposed seduction by English "practicality," Bax cited the translation and publication of the article by MacDonald.<sup>6</sup>

In a letter to Kautsky on November 8, 1896, Bernstein reported Bax's attack. Bernstein observed that Bax rejected modern civilization, spurned national interests, and distorted the MacDonald article. Just at the time Kautsky was writing his series of replies to Bax on whether the human spirit could evolve independently of material conditions,

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>5</sup>See earlier, 230.

<sup>6</sup>Bax, "Our German Fabian Convert," p. 6. Above, 156-160.



Bernstein proposed that Kautsky's best rejoinder would be to reprint part of Bax's *Justice* article, which in Bernstein's opinion presented a vulgar materialism. Bax had asserted that Bernstein was isolated on Turkey, and Bernstein feared that Liebknecht would help in this accusation because Liebknecht was close to Hyndman.<sup>7</sup>

In a response to Bax in *Justice* on November 14, Bernstein restated his basic position against assisting "savage" peoples fight higher culture but recognizing the right to nationality of peoples capable of culture. He contrasted his view with what he saw as Bax's vulgar materialism:

. . . it surprises me not a little to find the same Bax, who, only a few weeks ago, in the Fabianese Vienna *Zeit*, inveighed so severely against what he describes as the too narrow application of historic materialism by some Marxists suddenly preach in *Justice* the narrowest and grossest materialistic conception of the struggle of Social-Democracy. To call modern civilisation "a curse and an evil *per se*" and "absolutely antithetic to Socialism," to proclaim all and every national sentiment a "fraud," to give out mottoes like "slavery better than capitalism" is materialism with a vengeance. He implies the denial of all ideological acquisition of modern civilisation, of all evolution of ethics.

Bernstein maintained that Engels opposed helping the Herzegovinans in 1882, that in *Capital* Marx criticized Carlyle on slavery and capitalism, that Marx and Engels saw the unification of Germany as an advance, and that Lassalle held the views Bernstein had expressed on the rights of nationality.<sup>8</sup>

Then Bernstein repeated his argument that trying to stop capitalist expansion was a waste of time within the capitalist order. Bernstein wrote,

To aid, as he [Bax] proposes, the savages against advancing capitalist civilisation, if it were feasible, which it is not, would only prolong the struggle, not prevent it. Bax, some

<sup>7</sup>EB-KK November 8, 1896.

<sup>8</sup>Bernstein, "Amongst the Philistines. A Rejoinder to Belfort-Bax," *Justice*, November 14, 1896, p. 6.

time ago, advocated furnishing fire-arms to the savages in order to stiffen their power of resistance. But he forgot that he who uses fire-arms wants now and then fresh powder or cartridges, and that these do not, as yet, grow wild. To get them the savage must go to the trader, and once in intercourse with him he is irresistibly drawn into the charm of the same commercial influence the fire-arms were to protect him against. Bax's prescription, like his logic, turns around its own tail.

Bernstein asked whether Armenians should be sacrificed because they were more civilized. He claimed that his views were held by many social democrats, in Germany and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Bernstein objected to the accusation that he had become a Fabian and had abandoned social democracy:

. . . what Bax says about Fabian influence on me is partly untrue, partly of a nature not worth answering. It is not true that I have published Mr. MacDonald's lecture as "the last word of wisdom"—in fact, I stated in the introduction to his paper that I differed from it in many points; and it is not true that MacDonald said those things about bureaucracy Bax makes him say. I have often criticized the Fabians in the *Neue Zeit* and elsewhere, but I have acknowledged and do acknowledge that I regard them as Socialists whom I believe to be in their way as honest and devoted as any in England.

Bax mildly suggests that I have "unconsciously ceased to be a Social-Democrat." If to be a Social-Democrat requires one to advocate the maintenance of the Turkish Empire not although but because it is unreformed . . . , if it means cherishing the superstition that advanced industrialism is the only and worst form of exploitation and suppression, then I prefer belonging to the Philistines.<sup>10</sup>

Here, in effect, Bernstein allowed that if one understood Marxism the way people like Bax, Hyndman, and Liebknecht did, then he was not a

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6. Compare earlier, 172.

<sup>10</sup>Bernstein, "Amongst the Philistines," p. 6.

social democrat and was closer to the Fabians. The question remained: How should one interpret Marxism?

Bax's response to Bernstein in *Justice* November 21 documented the profound differences in their understandings of Marxism and colonialism. They agreed that to exist capitalism must expand, but they drew opposite conclusions from this premise. Bax believed that if arming the native peoples merely prolonged the struggle this was good, if the delay would give capitalism the opportunity to collapse.<sup>11</sup>

Bernstein, in contrast, thought that stopping the expansion of capitalism was impossible within a capitalist order. From Bax's viewpoint Bernstein's theory was non-socialist in that it ignored the necessary and imminent catastrophe; from Bernstein's perspective Bax's theory was non-Marxist because utopian, ignoring the evolution of those material conditions essential for socialism.

In his November 21 statement, Bax contested specific points of Bernstein. Bax explained that the allegation that Bernstein had abandoned social democracy rested in part on his review of Hyndman. Bax continued,

For the rest I confess I don't see why it should be regarded as specially materialistic to prefer primitive barbarism to capitalistic civilisation. The instinctive social ideal of the former, limited and crude though it be, seems to me not more, but less materialistic than the calculated individualist aims of the latter.

Bax emphasized again that modern nationalism was a fraud.<sup>12</sup> He had missed Bernstein's real criticism: that reducing national feelings and personal morals to economic interest was invalid. It was certainly not historical materialism.

Earlier in his polemic with Bax, an editorial in *Justice* had accused Bernstein of practically siding with the opponents of English socialism through his positions on the Chartered Company in the Matabeleland and on the Liberal agitation over Armenia. The editorial commented,

<sup>11</sup>Bax, letter to the editor, *Justice*, November 21, 1896, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6. See also EB-KK November 8, 1896.

No wonder English Liberal papers declare that the German Socialist movement is but an advanced Radical movement, and that if the same political conditions existed in Germany as obtain here there would be no Social-Democratic party in Germany at all.<sup>13</sup>

Was *Justice* hinting, perhaps, that Bernstein had abandoned social democracy for liberalism or radicalism?

On November 28 Bernstein replied in *Justice* both to the editorial and to Bax. Bernstein explained that he had not approved what was happening in the Matabeleland but rather had addressed the issue of social-democratic support for national movements. He said that from his position one could condemn ruthless actions against native peoples and that he endorsed the work of the Aborigines Protection Society. Bernstein wrote,

I do not want the natives of Africa or any other continent cheated and slaughtered, nor do I advocate forcing upon them modes of life for which their climate makes them unfit. If I maintained and maintain the right of the higher civilisation over the lower--and it is inconceivable to me how a Socialist can deny it--this does not mean that the latter has no rights at all, and that the rights of the former do not impose also duties. . . . from my standpoint is a thoroughly humane handling of the native question indicated, whilst with Bax all is dependent upon fancies and supposed momentary interest.<sup>14</sup>

Bernstein felt justified in implying (to *Justice* at least) that social democracy resembled radicalism. To him, the political goal of social democracy was that of radical reform, the goal of a democratic republic. He knew that at present in Germany the SPD's battle was still one for democracy. However, Bernstein implied that he was not willing to stop with political radicalism. To him, democracy did not exclude socialism:

<sup>13</sup>*Justice*, November 14, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>Bernstein, letter to the editor, *Justice*, November 28, 1896, p. 8.

There is neither use nor need to deny that the strength of Social Democracy in Germany is to some extent the result of its leading, and leading effectively, the struggle for political reform, for it is still to be proved that democratic reform is contradictory to Socialism, or that it excludes fighting for industrial emancipation. For the rest I can only refer to the fact that it is not my article on the Turkish question which gave occasion to the remark by *Justice* that German Social-Democracy is only Radicalism, but the deductions Bax drew from it.

Bernstein saw no foundation to the accusation that he had abandoned social democracy.<sup>15</sup>

While the polemic between Bernstein and Bax raged on in *Justice*, Kautsky was publishing his *Neue Zeit* articles against Bax. It is not surprising that in his conclusion to the series "What Will and Can the Materialist Conception of History Accomplish?" Kautsky came to the defense of his friend.<sup>16</sup>

Kautsky argued that one's understanding of how historical development occurred affected one's choice of political tactics. Kautsky quoted suggestions presented in the *Communist Manifesto*: the interests of Communists were those of the entire proletarian movement; they did not form an exclusive political party; they had no special principles to impose on the workers' movement. Communists were to be the determined and insightful members in labor parties everywhere. Their immediate political goals were found in other proletarian parties too. For Kautsky it was important that Marx and Engels had based communism on actual material conditions rather than on a set of ideals. Kautsky quoted the *Manifesto* that communism's principles were "... only general expressions of actual conditions of an existing class struggle, a historical movement taking place before our eyes." Kautsky

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8. In a note to the letter, the editors of *Justice* responded against Bernstein's charges.

<sup>16</sup>See earlier, 238-258.

observed that the *Communist Manifesto* both presented historical materialism and rejected utopianism and its sectarian consequences.<sup>17</sup>

Kautsky then contrasted this Marxist position with the one of Bax. Allegedly, his philosophy of history with its psychological drive evolving independently of material conditions led back into utopianism. It could culminate in sectarianism—that is, in retreat into a unique party independent of the labor movement and hostile toward all those not sharing the peculiar utopian vision. Kautsky explained,

The real movement will never correspond to the ideal of the "psychological drive." Idealists whose notions do not stem from insight into the conditions of the class struggle but rather from the "psychological drive" are thus easily repelled by the total proletarian movement. They seek to create a special movement alongside it which can be shaped according to their special principles—a movement which, since it possesses a higher ideal, thinks itself superior to the total movement. Instead of studying and understanding the total movement, utopians want to regiment it; instead of cooperating energetically within it, they try to pull it off track; for this reason they oppose it and hinder its progress wherever possible.

Kautsky warned that utopianism could lead to needless conflict of opinion and to greater difficulty in uniting the workers' movement.<sup>18</sup>

To Kautsky, the utopian and sectarian approach was profoundly non-Marxist. He supposed that nonetheless some socialists used Marx's principles in a utopian fashion. Kautsky emphasized,

It was the Marxists of this nature, who employ Marxist terms but do not think and work in a Marxist way and who turn the Marxist method into a schema (Schablone) which is supposed to render any independent work superfluous—these are the Marxists to whom Marx referred when he said that he did not want to be Marxist.

<sup>17</sup>Kautsky, "Was will und kann?" pp. 268f. Compare the *Communist Manifesto* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York, 1972), pp. 345f.

<sup>18</sup>Kautsky, "Was will und kann?" pp. 269f.



According to Kautsky, this utopian caricature of historical materialism was found in English social democracy.

A drastic example of this is provided by the article which Bax published in "Justice" on November 7 of this year entitled "Our Fabian Convert" and which was directed against Bernstein because of his article about the Armenian question in No. 4 of the "Neue Zeit." According to Bax it is "our duty as socialists to fight tooth and nail against any progress of civilization in barbaric and savage countries . . . [sic] Better slavery than capitalism, better the Arabian slave trader than the Chartered Company, this must be our motto." The struggles of the savages against civilization are our struggle, and it is our task to act everywhere against the expansion and development of the capitalist form of production.

Because Bernstein refuses to go along with this sentimental utopianism, Bax declares no less than that Bernstein has "unconsciously ceased to be a social democrat" and has--the worst possible thing Bax can say about a human being--sunk down to the level of a Fabian. We recommend to Mr. Kanner this article of his honored Bax for the "Zeit." It, too, is directed against a Marxist "inquisitor."

If everyone who shares Bernstein's viewpoints is no longer a social democrat in the sense of the Social Democratic Federation but rather a Fabian, then this explains the weakness of social democracy and the relative strength of Fabianism in England.

Kautsky concluded that the real source of social-democratic weakness in England was to be found in the tactics of the English social democrats influenced by utopianism. Thus one's interpretation of history did have immense implications for practical politics.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 270f. On Kautsky defending Bernstein against Bax, see Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854-1938. Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh, 1978), pp. 116f.

Bernstein appreciated Kautsky's article against Bax.<sup>20</sup> Understandably so. With his concluding remarks on utopianism, Kautsky had summarized the battle which he and Bernstein had fought together throughout 1896, in the months since Engels's death, and since the Erfurt Program. On the one side in the confrontation was the historical materialism of Marx and Engels as interpreted by Kautsky and Bernstein and the political tactics based on this theory, the actual practice of the SPD. On the other side was a utopian approach to socialism, a utopianism which Marx and Engels rejected. It was this battle that had shaped many of the political writings of Kautsky and Bernstein in 1896, and it was this battle that had motivated much of their theoretical work in the last half of the year. In 1896 the conflict raised many of the important questions which would later dominate the Revisionist Controversy.

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<sup>20</sup>EB-KK November 28, 1896. On December 7 Bernstein wrote Kautsky that Bax was utopian, a "True Socialist." "It is truly no wonder that Marxism is scorned in England when one sees how it is represented here." EB-KK December 7, 1896. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 32, also cites the December 7 letter.

## Chapter Six: The Turning Point (Winter 1897)

One key question of the Revisionist Controversy which had not arisen clearly in the theoretical and political debates of 1896 was whether Marx might have been mistaken in his earlier works—that is, not merely whether the SDF and Liebknecht wrongly appealed to outdated ideas but whether Marx himself had been wrong when he first had those ideas. The question appeared in essays which Bernstein published at the very end of 1896 or in 1897 but which grew directly out of the 1896 polemics. Again Bernstein sought to defend a mature Marxism from what he considered to be misinterpretations; and since the latter utilized Marx's writings and especially those from around the middle of the century, the question of their correctness was unavoidable. Bernstein confessed that on some issues Marx had erred; but Bernstein emphasized that both Marx and Engels had admitted their mistakes. Bernstein believed that one should use historical materialism as further improved by the two, not cling to opinions they later abandoned. For Bernstein, their method of analysis still held true, despite inaccurate conclusions they had at one time drawn using the method. The theory correctly understood was a method of analysis, not a set of results.

### A. Bertrand Russell and Social Democracy

One of the first opportunities Bernstein received at the end of 1896 to distinguish Marxism as he understood it from the interpretations of Marxism provided by the SDF or Liebknecht came in a review of one of the first published books of Great Britain's pre-eminent twentieth-century philosopher, Bertrand Russell. His *German Social Democracy* combined six lectures given at the London School of Economics in the spring of 1896. When he asked Bernstein to evaluate the book, Kautsky remarked at how little, it seemed, Russell had studied key sources on historical materialism:

Judging from the bibliography, he knows too little of our literature, not even the *Anti-Dühring*, the *Origin of the Family*, *18th Brumaire*, . . . One has to know the texts, of course, if one wants to write about the teachings and relations of Marx and Engels.

Bernstein explained that Russell had based his book on observations and on discussions with social democrats in Berlin. Russell had meant well, even if he had misinterpreted Marxism.<sup>1</sup>

In his *Neue Zeit* review, Bernstein criticized Russell for presenting too bleak a picture of the SPD's situation in Germany because of his tendency to generalize from certain police actions. Russell was rightly upset by these actions; however, Bernstein continued,

What he does not see, or at least does not reveal distinctly enough, is the high degree of bourgeois development which Germany has reached and by which, despite the wounds they inflict here and there, the glory and wisdom of the police are foiled time and again. Besides which, the police itself in its better and more insightful agencies is eminently bourgeois today.

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<sup>1</sup>KK-EB December 8, 1896; EB-KK December 12, 1896.

Fabian Society Papers, C 60/1 f 8-9, is a printed syllabus for lectures on German social democracy given by Bertrand Russell. From the document one may surmise that he focused on Liebknecht. Neither Kautsky nor Bernstein is mentioned.

Russell published the lectures as the book *German Social Democracy*, 2nd. ed. (London, 1965); the 1st ed. was London 1896. Both James W. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London. A Study of Five Unorthodox Socialists* (Oxford, 1970), p. 141, and Helmut Hirsch, "Die bezüglich der Fabian Society transparenten Kommunikationsstrukturen als Teilaspekte der internationalen Voraussetzungen der Herausbildung des Revisionismus von Eduard Bernstein," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus. Bericht über den wissenschaftlichen Kongreß "Die historische Leistung und aktuelle Bedeutung Eduard Bernsteins,"* Horst Heimann and Thomas Meyer, eds. (Berlin, 1978), pp. 57f., indicate that Bernstein was aware of Russell's lectures or the book which came from them.

Fabian Society Papers, C 39, Fabian Society. Minute Book of Society Meetings No. 4, 14 February 1896 to 14 June 1901, entry for February 14, 1896, describes a members meeting at Cliffords Inn to which Russell spoke on Germany. It lists Eduard Bernstein among participants in the discussion.

Bernstein faulted Russell for ignoring a powerful social-economic evolution which drove even non-proletarian elements of German society toward socialism:

If, however, from the fact that the political Reaction in Germany is the unavoidable albeit unintended consequence of the phenomenal growth of social democracy Herr Russell deduces that this development is heading into a dead-end street, then we must object that for his part he completely underestimates the power of forces acting invisibly in the womb of society. He overlooks that what is called the Reaction itself has a new face from era to era because of the cooperation of these forces, on the one hand, with socialist propaganda, on the other, and that in Germany, too, the parties hostile to social democracy cannot in the long run escape the influence of socialist thought.<sup>2</sup>

In this passage Bernstein defended the SPD against the charge that its lot was hopeless because the party's very success generated ever stronger opposition. Bernstein's counter-argument was Marxist to the extent that it rested on an analysis of evolving material conditions. He might perhaps have been thinking of those bourgeois who had joined in defeating the "revolution bill" or in opposing the change in the Saxon suffrage. Yet, Bernstein's estimation of the German government as becoming less oppressive was probably far from the common SPD perception. In the months between the "revolution bill" of 1895 and the "penitentiary bill" (*Zuchthausvorlage*) of 1898, his assessment may well have surprised many German readers of *Neue Zeit*. Perhaps Bernstein's interpretation of Marxism and his dislike for the thinking of Liebknecht or the SDF had led him into this anomalous position. Having witnessed how a more peaceful form of class struggle accompanied advanced economic conditions in Great Britain, Bernstein may have deduced that social-economic evolution in Germany would

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<sup>2</sup>Bernstein, "Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie in englischer Beleuchtung," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 431-433.



bring a similar result. Did he not forget his own insight that the political Superstructure could vary from the economic Basis?<sup>3</sup>

Bernstein claimed that Russell had misunderstood Marxism along with the SPD:

Moreover Herr Russell is also very wrong when he accuses the party--the Vollmar tendency excepted--of a policy of all or nothing and traces this back to "Marxism." . . . It was no one less than Friedrich Engels who a few years ago declared: we also take installments.

Still, where Marxism is concerned the view of Herr Russell is undoubtedly clouded. His criticism of Marxist theory is a veritable reservoir of errors refuted long ago.

Bernstein alleged that Russell had uncritically accepted various attacks on Marx. Bernstein wrote,

What he [Russell] advances as criticism of Marx is thus for the most part a criticism of things with which Marx had nothing to do. Admittedly, in addition he touches on points which indeed seem to us to bear discussion; but here is not the place to address them. We shall return to the more important questions in another context.

Bernstein inferred that Russell had, apparently, consulted neither Engels's *Anti-Dühring* nor Kautsky's Erfurt Program commentary.<sup>4</sup>

Bernstein reported that even though Russell found Marxism wrong, he did not want the SPD to abandon it. With a long quotation Bernstein showed that the Englishman understood the theory to be the religion of the SPD and believed that for the party to lose its faith would constitute an immense defeat. Instead, Russell hoped that the SPD would sacrifice "logical precision," as supposedly Bebel and Liebknecht had done at Breslau, and follow a tactic contradicting

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<sup>3</sup>See earlier, 107-110 and 136-138. See also Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," in *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky, Jr., ed. (Assen, 1971), p. xxxi.

<sup>4</sup>Bernstein, "Deutsche Sozialdemokratie in Beleuchtung," pp. 433f. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 32, also quotes the article.

its basic principles. Bernstein countered this charge of a contradiction between theory and practice:

. . . we have to repeat to Herr Russell that Marxism does not at all exclude compromise and that Marxist theory is far from collapsing although the actual development of things does not correspond in every detail to the conclusions Marx drew from the material available to him. Its essential content is, rather, not touched by this in any way.<sup>5</sup>

When he had admitted earlier that Russell had mentioned issues which deserved more discussion, perhaps Bernstein had in mind instances where Marx had correctly used his method of analysis but with insufficient data and had therefore reached incorrect results. To Bernstein such cases explained certain false conclusions; they did not disprove the method itself.

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<sup>5</sup>Bernstein, "Deutsche Sozialdemokratie in Beleuchtung," p. 435.

## B. Bernstein's Fabian Speech

On January 29, 1897, Bernstein had opportunity to take up the question of Marx and Engels having been mistaken. The chance arose with a speech to the Fabian Society which climaxed Bernstein's long struggle to defend a mature Marxism against misinterpretation.

Perhaps the roots of Bernstein's Fabian lecture lay, in part, in his battle with Hyndman and Liebknecht in September 1896 and in Kautsky's struggle at about the same time against Bax and Kanner. On a postcard to Kautsky dated September 23, just as he finished the review of Hyndman's recent book on economics, Bernstein proposed an article for *Neue Zeit* on the question "Was Marx a Marxist?" Bernstein wanted to express his opinion "on the relationship of disciple to master—i.e., to show that adopting a theory and working further with it as a foundation is something entirely different from parroting." At the beginning of the debate on Turkey, the comment probably referred to Liebknecht along with the SDF. It resembled Luxemburg's attitude that the true Marxist would freely apply the method of analysis to new circumstances rather than mechanically repeat conclusions Marx formed decades before.<sup>1</sup>

Just in August 1896, Kautsky had rebutted Bax, who had cited Marx's statement "I myself am not a Marxist." Kautsky replied to Bernstein on September 25 that he would appreciate an article on "Was Marx a Marxist?" Then in an editorial the very next day, Kanner appealed again to Shaw's *Cosmopolis* article lambasting the SPD for the supposed contradiction between its violent theory and peaceful practice. On October 5 Bernstein shared with Kautsky a reason why the Fabians would fail to understand Marxism:

They are pure empiricists in both the good and bad sense and also take Marxism . . . empirically, the way it confronts them in the form of Hyndman, Liebknecht, Aveling. They do not know that this Marxism is very non-Marxist, or rather, how very non-Marxist it is.

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<sup>1</sup>EB-KK September 23, 1896. On Bernstein's review of Hyndman, see above, 271 note 1. For the debate on Turkey, see above, 215-233. For Luxemburg's questioning the direct applicability of some earlier views of Marx, see above, 193 and 224f.

Bernstein said that he would write an essay for *The Progressive Review* to demonstrate that Marxism could not be equated with the thought of these three.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps Bernstein's decision this time to discuss the meaning of Marxism in *The Progressive Review* (instead of in *Neue Zeit*) was motivated partially by a desire to use the article first as a speech in London. On October 2 the executive committee of the Fabian Society had proposed to Bernstein that he lecture on Marxism. Various titles were considered, but all with the goal of contrasting alternative understandings of Marxism. On October 19 Bernstein wrote Edward Pease that he was not overly concerned about the exact wording but that he preferred one which would not be too aggressive against those who considered themselves Marxists. They finally settled on "What Marx Really Taught."<sup>3</sup>

Bernstein's hope may have been the following: If he could prove that there were two profoundly different interpretations of Marxism—a correct scientific one and a false utopian one—then he could show how Shaw's criticisms pertained primarily to the SDF and those who thought like it; he could clarify Kautsky's refusal to attack the Fabians; he could meet Bax's challenge on the relationship of Marx to the writings of Kautsky; and he could answer Liebknecht and Hyndman that being a true Marxist involved more than quoting statements made 40 or 50 years before.

On January 29, 1897, the private meeting of the London Fabian Society assembled at Cliffords Inn next to Fleet Street 187. Bernstein began by alleging that Marx had been read in a biased fashion and that academics claimed he was a genius in order to inflate their own importance in tearing him to pieces. However, Bernstein continued, the man whom these intellectuals ridiculed was a straw-man, created in part by enthusiastic supporters; and since the false interpretation had

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<sup>2</sup>KK-EB September 25, 1896; EB-KK October 5, 1896. For the polemic between Kautsky and Bax and Kanner, see earlier, 238-265 and 286-288. For the article by Shaw, see earlier, 265-269.

<sup>3</sup>Helmut Hirsch, *Der "Fabier" Eduard Bernstein. Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des evolutionären Sozialismus* (Bonn, 1977), p. 35 note 43 and p. 36. Also in Fabian Society Papers, C 6, Fabian Society Executive Committee Minutes, 11 January 1895 to 12 February 1897, entries for October 2 and October 23, 1896; and Fabian Society Papers, A 6/1 84. Hirsch, "Bezüglich der Fabian Society," p. 51.

advocates as well as opponents, it was important to find out just what Marx had taught. Though Bernstein believed that Marx had been misunderstood in respect both to theory of history and to economic theory, he decided that there was time only for the former topic.<sup>4</sup>

To illustrate his point that intelligent people misinterpreted Marx, Bernstein asserted that Russell had attributed to Marx a theory emphasizing economic motives alone and denying any importance to morals. Bernstein said that this interpretation was wrong. He thus replied to Bax's presentation of historical materialism which identified material conditions with material interests.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Hirsch gives the location of the speech in *Der "Fabier" Eduard Bernstein*, p. 121. Also in Fabian Society Papers, C 39, Fabian Society Minute Book of Society Meetings No. 4, 14 February 1896 to 14 June 1901, entry for January 29, 1897. EB-KK February 7, 1897.

The introduction and the decision not to include a section on economics can be inferred from an advertisement of the speech in the *Fabian News* and a later report. Both were translated and published in Hirsch, *Der "Fabier" Eduard Bernstein*, pp. 121-123. See also *Justice*, February 6, 1897, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>Bernstein, "Karl Marx and Social Reform," *The Progressive Review*, II (May 1897), 140f.

Two categories of evidence reveal that the article was an edited version of the original Fabian speech. On the one hand, there is Bernstein's correspondence with Kautsky. Correspondence mentioned earlier, 296f. notes 1 and 2, suggest that Bernstein may have written the Fabian address in place of the proposed article for *Neue Zeit* and with the intention of eventual publication in *The Progressive Review*. Of far greater importance is EB-KK May 17, 1897, where Bernstein indicated that his article in *The Progressive Review* was the Fabian lecture.

On the other hand, there exist several published newspaper accounts of the speech; they list specific points Bernstein made; and these points correspond almost exactly to statements in *The Progressive Review*. Besides the *Fabian News* advertisement and report mentioned earlier, 298 note 4, see also *Justice*, February 6, 1897, p. 8. In *Justice*, February 13, 1897, p. 3, Bernstein quotes extensively from the Fabian address; the same passages occur in *The Progressive Review* article.

In editing his lecture for publication, Bernstein apparently dropped the original introduction contrasting the true and false

Bernstein then presented the historical materialism he shared with Kautsky: Economic and social relationships formed only the ultimate causes in the evolution of society and morals; as a culture progressed, the determining role of material forces became ever less apparent because of the increasing influence of ideological tradition. Bernstein stated,

In every period of history we can easily distinguish a prevailing mode of production and exchange, and a corresponding conception of life, and of duties and rights, which also prevail and determine the nature of the social and political institutions of the period. This is quite obvious in the earlier stages of social life. But the more complex society becomes, the more will the objective causes of social evolution recede into the background, and subjective ones appear to determine its course. But, powerful as the subjective factor is in history, it is still under the control of the functioning of the economical foundations of social life.

Bernstein claimed that critics had not been able to name a country with commercial production accompanied by feudal law. Twenty years before, Bernstein argued, the Nihilists in Russia had failed because they were too advanced for the material conditions, while the later economic development there had revolutionized people's thinking more and had produced a labor movement. In contrast to Bax, Bernstein implied that capitalism could not be circumvented on the way to socialism:

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understandings of Marx, avoided mentioning the Nihilist movement by name, omitted a phrase about an hypothetical earthquake swallowing Shaw and Haldane, deleted a reference to emigration and to capitalism conquering new worlds before it would be finished, and finally added a new introduction and conclusion about reform and Marx's ideas changing over his lifetime.

My analysis along with the text of "Karl Marx and Social Reform" is in my article, "Eduard Bernstein Speaks to the Fabians: A Turning Point in Social Democratic Thought?" *International Review of Social History*, XXVIII (1983), 320-338.

On Bax and the difference between material conditions and material interests, see above, 244 and 247f.



The dream, fostered by men like Bakunin, of saving the Russians the period of bourgeois economy is done with forever; neither can the all-powerful Tsar--to speak with Marx--remove it by decree, nor can the fiery revolutionist make Russia jump over its phases of evolution with the aid of dynamite.

In short, there is what we Germans call *Gesetzmässigkeit*--an order of law--in social evolution.

Bernstein quoted Marx's 1859 statement that a particular social structure would endure until the potential of the older system of production had been actualized and new relationships of production established. This was how Marxism understood the objective aspect of social evolution, according to Bernstein.<sup>6</sup>

He said that the theory found the subjective side of social evolution in the class struggle. Perhaps alluding to Shaw, Bernstein acknowledged that some people argued there was no class struggle in England; he admitted that the laborers seemed passive. Bernstein conceded,

The facts, themselves, cannot be denied, but they do not disprove the class-war theory as put forward by Marx; they only disprove some crude and narrow interpretations of it.

First of all there are different forms of warfare.

Bernstein quoted Marx's Preface to *Capital* that the revolutionary process could assume different characters depending on the nature of the proletariat. Bernstein maintained that the English workers had made considerable progress using a constitutional approach but that it did not arouse great passions. He suggested that the workers might

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<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, "Karl Marx and Social Reform," pp. 141f.

Bernstein's contrast of anarchism with Marxism is in the *Fabian News* summary in Hirsch, *Der "Fabier" Eduard Bernstein*, p. 122; the reference to the Nihilists is found on the same page and also in the summary in *Justice*, February 6, 1897, p. 8.

That Bernstein believed his interpretation of historical materialism was that of Marx himself is revealed in EB-KK May 17, 1897. For Kautsky's emphasis on the increasing importance of ideological factors, see above, 252. For Bernstein's earlier quoting of a passage resembling one in the 1859 Preface, see above, 164f.

have been less passive but for men like Webb and Shaw, Haldane and Dilke--non-proletarians dedicated to reform. Upper-class politicians championed socialist principles primarily because the suffrage endowed the laborers with political power. Bernstein remarked that certain socialist leaders had wrongly ignored this important point. To him, electoral reform was not "mere Radicalism"; it made possible proletarian emancipation. Bernstein cited Palmerston's prediction in 1860 that members of the House of Commons would "play to the galleries instead of to the boxes." Most tried to serve the workers' interests. Bernstein summarized,

All this gives the class-struggle another form.

It works to-day more as a potential than as an active force, more by the knowledge of what it might be than by actual manifestation. Politically as well as economically it is fought by sections of divisions, and often in forms which are the reverse of what they ought to be according to the letter, so that it might appear as if it were not the social classes that contest with one another the control of legislation but rather the legislators that fight for the satisfaction of the classes. But the class struggle is no less a reality because it has taken the shape of continuous barter and compromise.

As other causes for the peculiar development of class conflict in England, Bernstein noted both the emigration of laborers and also capital still having room to expand--two issues which had arisen earlier in polemics with Bax.<sup>7</sup>

Next Bernstein pointed out that Marx had found Darwin very important. Marxism was quite evolutionary. However, Bernstein cautioned, one needed to be careful to understand just what was meant. One could, for example, picture evolution in a "Pickwickian sense" so that it stood in contrast to revolution; but Marxism did not, according to Bernstein.

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<sup>7</sup>Bernstein, "Karl Marx and Social Reform," pp. 142-144. For the passages on Shaw and Haldane and on emigration and the expansion of capital, see the *Fabian News* summary of the speech in Hirsch, *Der "Fabier" Eduard Bernstein*, p. 122, and the summary in *Justice*, February 6, 1897, p. 8. Compare *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York, 1972), p. 193.

To Marx, evolution included revolution and vice versa; the one was a stage of the other. Not every revolution must be violent or sanguinary. But, besides those brought about by industrial changes alone, we have those phases of social evolution, which take the shape of, or are brought about by, political revolutions. They, too, have their drawbacks, undoubtedly, but they have also their advantages—they clear away in a day the dust and the rubbish that else would take generations to remove—they are, in the words of Marx, the locomotives of history.

Against an emphasis on peaceful political as well as social change, Bernstein here defended the view that political revolutions might sometimes release social evolution. Still, for Bernstein it was important to emphasize that Marx rejected the utopianism which believed mere will could bring about revolution, irrespective of material conditions. Bernstein said, "Marx, then, was, if you like to put it thus, a revolutionary evolutionist. But he was far from revolutionary romanticism." In a rejoinder to Shaw, Bernstein denied that Marx had thought "heat was more important than light" in the "natural philosophy of Socialism." For example, in 1850 Marx had fought the romanticism of the Communist League. Bernstein quoted Marx from September 1850,

"The minority puts into the place of the critical a dogmatic conception. To them not real existing conditions are the motive force of revolution, but mere will. Whilst we tell the workers, you must run through 15, 20, 50 years of civil wars and struggles, not only for changing the conditions, but for altering yourselves and for rendering yourselves capable of political supremacy, you on the contrary declare: 'We must at once capture power, or we may go and lay down to sleep'."

Perhaps Bernstein had Mehring in mind as he continued the quotation,

"Whilst we explain, especially to the German workmen, how undeveloped the proletariat is in Germany, you flatter in the coarsest way the national sentiment and the sectional prejudice of the German handicraftsmen—a process which, true, is more popular. Just as the Democrats have made the word people, so you have made the word proletariat a fetish.

Just like the Democrats, you substitute the revolutionary phrase for the revolutionary evolution."<sup>8</sup>

Bernstein anticipated the question that might flash through the minds of his skeptical Fabian listeners: What of the *Communist Manifesto*'s concluding remark that communist goals could be achieved only through overthrow? Bernstein answered that the *Manifesto* had appeared under particular political circumstances. He observed that the communist movement was still young, as were Marx and Engels. According to Bernstein, the *Manifesto* had a polemical purpose, against the then popular communism of universal love. Its authors had intended the *Manifesto* to help educate the proletariat; to them, Bernstein claimed, education far outweighed conspiracy in significance. Most important, in Bernstein's judgment, they had overestimated the progress of material conditions in 1848 and had accordingly decided on a revolutionary policy which was not yet appropriate. Bernstein stressed that Marx and Engels themselves admitted their mistake:

But it shall not be denied—Engels himself has it in one of his last publications expressly stated—that Marx and he in 1848 greatly over-estimated the state of industrial evolution attained. They believed the breakdown of bourgeois civilisation to be within hail, if, however, to be worked out in a prolonged series of revolutions. And in their over-estimation of the state of social evolution they were even less sanguine than other Socialists of the time. . . . The year 1848 brought the great disappointment. How Marx understood its lesson the speech made in 1850 has shown. In our appreciation of the quickness of social movement we are always subject to error, and may have continuously to correct ourselves, whilst our theory holds good all the time.<sup>9</sup>

For Bernstein the important thing about Marxism was its objectively analyzing actual material conditions in order to base political strategy on those conditions rather than on a particular vision

<sup>8</sup>Bernstein, "Karl Marx and Social Reform," pp. 144-146. That the allusion to Shaw is stated in *Justice*, February 6, 1897, p. 8. Earlier, 156.

<sup>9</sup>Bernstein, "Karl Marx and Social Reform," p. 146.

of how history must develop or of what the future society would be like; the scientific study of society separated the true Marxist from the utopians. Bernstein argued,

If his theory did not always protect Marx from too sanguine a view of the march of events, it, on the other hand, obliged him to propose nothing which was not based on a close study of actual conditions. He strongly resisted temptations to prescribe remedies for the future. To study the given economic conditions of society, to follow their march closely, to ascertain what to do—not from an imaginary perfect socialist world, but from the very imperfect world we live in and its actual requirements—is therefore the task of the disciples of Marx. People may repeat in eloquent terms the general doctrines of the class war, and speak again and again of the social revolution and the socialisation of all the means of production, exchange, and distribution—they will still be poor Marxists if they refuse to acknowledge changes in the economical evolution which contradict former assumptions, and decline to act accordingly.<sup>10</sup>

Here perhaps was the response to Hyndman, Bax, and Liebknecht that Bernstein had initially intended for his article "Was Marx a Marxist?"

Next there followed examples from Marx's life which for Bernstein illuminated what Marx had really taught and contradicted the utopian theory attributed to him. Significantly, many examples contradicted specific policies or ideas which Bernstein found wrong with Liebknecht or the SDF. In the 1840's Marx and Engels opposed socialists who rejected parliamentary government, Bernstein reported. He referred to the passage in the *Communist Manifesto* that communists were to support the progressive bourgeois. Bernstein continued that in alliance with democrats in 1848 Marx and Engels advocated a Radical policy. In 1850 they opposed revolutionary activities because the material conditions were not right for success. Bernstein told how during the War Between the States in America, Marx had championed the North and had criticized Carlyle. In the 1860's the First International made common cause with the English Reform League, which included Radicals, in its campaign to extend the suffrage. Again

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 146f.

Bernstein had pointed out how Marx had favored cooperation with liberal democrats—the policy which Liebknecht condemned even though the SPD practiced it, contributing to Shaw's accusing the party of a contradiction between theory and practice. To Bernstein, the Inaugural Address and the statutes Marx wrote for the First International in 1864 were non-sectarian, designed to encompass the entire labor movement. Marx had insisted that the emancipation of the workers must be their own achievement. Implicitly against Russell but also perhaps in reply to Bax, Bernstein added,

To him who is unable to detect in works like "Das Kapital" appeals to human sympathy and morality, the rules of the International may be a proof that there was even with Marx a question of morality and justice, of duties and of love of man.

According to Bernstein, Marx's efforts on behalf of the First International were characterized by encouragement of trade unions, cooperatives, labor legislation, and public education along with the demand for socialization of transportation, mines, forests, and land. There was nothing about conspiracy.<sup>11</sup>

Bernstein wished to say that Marx was neither an anarchist nor one believing in miracles from the state, that he taught that the state would fit the society. In Marx's original theory the proletariat would take over and use the state machinery, but already in the 1860's he warned against state control of public education, Bernstein explained; later Marx advocated federalism. Bernstein recalled,

In the famous pamphlet on the Paris Commune, Marx had more fully sketched out his ideas on the coming political organisation of society. There he declares bluntly that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wield it for its own purpose". On the other hand, nothing would be more against the purpose than to break up the big nations into small independent states. "The unity of great nations", he writes, "if originally brought about

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 147-151. The summary published in the *Fabian News* ends with Bernstein's description of the International, but the announcement includes later points. Hirsch, *Der "Fabier" Eduard Bernstein*, pp. 121-123.



by political force, has now become a powerful co-efficient of social production". It is not to be abolished. Through democratisation of local and municipal government, by increasing the functions and powers of local elected bodies, through a proper system of devolution and delegation of powers the State was to be changed into a real commonwealth—not a power above Society, but a tool in the hands of an organised Democracy.<sup>12</sup>

Here was support for the municipal socialism which Liebknecht and the SDF questioned.

Bernstein knew that many in England associated Marxism with violence. He wished to say that Marx's famous statement about force being the midwife of change had occurred in a discussion of governmental power, not political revolution:

Here I may also refer to the famous sentence, "Force is the midwife of an old society in child-birth with a new society." A thousand times it has been quoted, and in 999 cases in the sense of an appeal to brute violence. But if we look to the passage where it is taken from, what examples of force do we find there? The Colonial systems, the funding system, modern taxation, the system of commercial protection. "Some of these methods", says Marx, "are based on brute force, as the Colonial system". "But all", he continues, "utilise the power of the State, the centralised and organised force of Society, to foster the process of evolution with hothouse vigour, and to shorten the transition periods". And then follows the sentence: "Force is the midwife of society", etc. It is quite evident, then, that it is, before all, the utilisation of the power of organised society Marx emphasises here, and not brute force.

Bernstein cited both Marx's 1872 Amsterdam statement that in countries like England the laborers could win freedom through peaceful means and Marx's 1844 letter to Ruge indicating to Bernstein that Marx

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 140 and 151f. On Marx and federalism, compare above, 189.

had rejected utopianism at the very time he turned to socialism.<sup>13</sup> Bernstein quoted Marx's *The Civil War in France*,

"The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending, by its own economic agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men."

Bernstein concluded, "These words alone dispel the idea that Marx expected the realisation of a socialist society from one great cataclysm."<sup>14</sup> Here was the misinterpretation which Bernstein most wished to refute.

If the Marx of Bernstein's Fabian speech had confronted the thinking of Hyndman, Bax, or Liebknecht, he might well have avowed "I am not a Marxist!" However, this Marx was not the one the Fabians had met in the speeches of the SDF and Liebknecht; and Hubert Bland, one of the Fabian essayists, queried Bernstein. In a letter to Bebel on October 20, 1898, Bernstein identified the short discussion following his Fabian address to be the turning point in the evolution of his attitude toward Marxism:

This moulting is the result of a very long development, or rather, it took a very long time for me to realize fully that the moulting concerned not only specialized questions but

<sup>13</sup>In a letter to Engels on September 14, 1892, Bernstein requested the passage from Marx's letter to Ruge which read "We do not approach the world with a finished dogma." Bernstein intended the quotation for his article marking the tenth anniversary of *Neue Zeit*. Bernstein believed that the text showed Marx and Engels's opposition to "utopianism and all schematic and ossified socialism." Eduard Bernstein, *Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Engels*, Helmut Hirsch ed. (Assen, 1970), p. 400. The letter to Ruge is in *Marx-Engels Werke*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, ed. (Berlin, 1957ff.), I, 343-346; and in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>14</sup>Bernstein, "Karl Marx and Social Reform," pp. 152-154.

touched on the fundamentals of Marxism. Up until two years ago I tried, rather, through "stretching" Marxist teachings to bring them into accord with practice. Significantly but also understandably, I fully realized the impossibility of this intent only when I gave a lecture on "What Marx Really Taught" to the Fabian Society one and a half years ago. I still have the manuscript of the lecture; it is a frightening example of a well intentioned "rescue attempt." I wanted to save Marx, wanted to show that everything had occurred as he had said and that everything which had not occurred in this way had also been said by him not to happen. But when the stunt was ready, when I read the lecture, it flashed through my mind: You are doing Marx an injustice; what you are presenting is not Marx. And a few harmless questions which a sharp Fabian, Hubert Bland, asked me after the lecture and which I still answered in the old fashion finished me. I quietly told myself: it cannot go on like this. It is futile to seek to reconcile the irreconcilable. What is necessary is rather to gain clarity about where Marx is still correct and where he is not. If the latter is thrown out, the memory of Marx is better served than if one stretches his theory until it proves everything, the way I did and many continue to do today. For then Marx's theory proves nothing at all.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, compare the speech itself with Bernstein's recollection in his letter to Bebel some twenty months later! In the address Bernstein had not tried to defend each prediction Marx had made; he had insisted a true Marxist based policies on actual material conditions, not preconceived notions. In the speech Bernstein did not "stretch" Marxism to conform to the SPD's actual practice; he opposed an interpretation of Marx which implied a contradiction of theory and practice where none existed. In his 1898 letter Bernstein apparently forgot that in so many details his Fabian address had been aimed at the

<sup>15</sup>Bernstein to Bebel, October 20, 1898, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Friedrich Adler, ed. (Vienna, 1954), p. 260. The letter is also quoted in Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism. Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1962), p. 73. See also Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Das Mandat des Intellektuellen. Karl Kautsky und die Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin, 1986), pp. 120f.

thought of Bax, Hyndman, or Liebknecht—or at Fabians who assumed that these three represented Marxism—not against the historical materialism of Kautsky. Moreover, if Bernstein had really felt so badly about the speech just after giving it, then why did he publish it? Such observations may lead one to conclude that far from being an accurate recollection of his position in January 1897, his letter to Bebel in October 1898 actually reflected Bernstein's attitude after eight months of bitter criticism from Luxemburg, Plekhanov, Parvus, and finally Kautsky. By this time Bernstein associated "Marxism" in part with the utopianism he had abjured in his speech; and it did require "stretching" to make such thinking meet the practices of the SPD.

Bernstein's defense of mature Marxism against the versions of Liebknecht and the SDF climaxed in his speech to the Fabians. Bernstein sought to defend the mature interpretation by publicly rejecting particular judgments made by Marx in the late 1840's and in 1850—abandoning these judgments not merely as outdated but as wrong to begin with. However, Bernstein underlined that in his Introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850* Engels had admitted that he and Marx had been wrong. For Bernstein, the later ideas of Marx and Engels rectified earlier mistakes; Marxism was corrected from within.

Bernstein returned to this issue in a letter to *Justice* to amend the paper's summary of his Fabian speech. He quoted the section which cited Engels's confession that he and Marx had overestimated the degree of economic development in 1848 and had been wrong to anticipate imminent collapse. Bernstein also quoted his opinion that one should distinguish between the doctrines of Marx and "their practical application," one's understanding of the facts sometimes being inadequate while the "theory holds good all the time." Then Bernstein listed other points Engels had made in the 1895 Introduction: Social revolution could not be accomplished suddenly; the time of revolutions led by small minorities was past; the masses must become consciously involved in the revolutionary process; long educational effort was needed.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup>*Justice*, February 13, 1897, p. 3. On Engels's Introduction to *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*, see earlier, 55-58.

Kautsky came to share Bernstein's opinion that Marx and Engels themselves corrected earlier views and particularly those from the years 1848-1850; see Kautsky, review of *Marxismus und Philosophie* by Karl Korsch, *Die Gesellschaft*, I (1924), 312.

Overestimating the degree of social-economic evolution, anticipating an imminent collapse of capitalism to be followed by proletarian rule, expecting intensified business crises to inaugurate the catastrophe, imagining that the new order could be established overnight—Bernstein believed that such ideas characterized utopianism, not the mature thought of Marx's later writings and political activities, of Engels, and of Kautsky. In defending mature Marxism by discarding certain earlier views of Marx, Bernstein could still believe that he was loyally following the direction of Marx and Engels themselves and then of Kautsky. To be a true disciple of Marx and Engels required admitting that the two could make mistakes and applying their method anew even if it meant reaching new results. Little did Bernstein realize that within the year he would identify the true Marxist as one who clung to the supposed mistakes of Marx and Engels or that he would come to see these mistakes as calling for criticism of Marx's method.

### C. The Addendum to Hérítier

Possibly the most startling aspect of Bernstein's Fabian speech was his citing Engels's admission that Marx had made certain mistakes in mid-century. Accordingly, one might imagine that Bland's "harmless questions" on January 29, 1897, concerned the 1848 Revolution. Could overestimating material conditions in France have caused Marx wrongly to identify Blanqui as a true leader of the proletariat—which he implied in *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850* and stated in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*? In 1896 Bernstein struggled with the relationship of Marx to Blanqui while he edited and translated Louis Hérítier's *History of the French Revolution of 1848 and the Second Republic*.<sup>1</sup> In footnotes and an addendum Bernstein countered the author's portrayal of some events and his general approach which, for Bernstein, failed to consider material conditions sufficiently.

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<sup>1</sup>*Marx-Engels Werke*, VII, p. 30; and *Marx-Engels Werke*, VIII, p. 121. See also Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 443. On Marx, Engels, and Blanquism see Richard N. Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels* (Pittsburgh, 1974), I, *passim*. The relationship of Marx to Blanqui remains a controversial issue among scholars.

Blanquism was characterized by a conspiratorial approach to revolution. Hence utopianism as understood by Kautsky and Bernstein (the ignoring of actual material conditions to focus on a picture of the socialist society or of how history would move toward socialism via collapse) need not imply Blanquism; nor Blanquism, utopianism. Still, Bernstein came to associate the two. Thomas Meyer, *Bernsteins konstruktiver Sozialismus. Eduard Bernsteins Beitrag zur Theorie des Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1977), pp. 157f., 162, and 165, explains that Bernstein understood Blanquism to include belief that in a social revolution a new social system could suddenly replace an older one. Bernstein held Blanquism responsible for social democrats failing to consider the problems associated with a transition to socialism.

Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 31, mentions that Bernstein worked on the Hérítier text throughout 1896. Bernstein's frustration with the task is reflected in the following: EB-KK April 19, 1896; EB-KK December 7, 1896; EB-KK December 12; KK-EB December 17.



Bernstein insisted that an analysis based on historical materialism would judge the Revolution successful since it accomplished all that the material conditions of the time allowed—a bourgeois democratic republic. According to Bernstein, the February Revolution was immensely important for winning democracy; it ended many feudal privileges, liberated the press, granted freedom of assembly, and through the suffrage brought all classes into the political process. The Provisional Government was the most advanced possible, Bernstein believed. The elections to the National Assembly were fair; if anything, the National Assembly was more republican than the population at large. In Bernstein's opinion, the Luxembourg assembly tried to meet the valid demands of the laborers; it aimed at a long-term goal but kept the present situation in mind; it encouraged workers' organizations and proposed important reforms.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to the Luxembourg group, Louis Blanc, and Proudhon—who based their proposals on a thoughtful if sometimes faulty assessment of material conditions—the radical club politicians inspired by Blanqui followed the model of the French Revolution, according to Bernstein. They ignored actual conditions and practical demands and accordingly failed to pursue the true interests of the proletariat. For example, in April 1848 there occurred a demonstration which brought response by the National Guard; Bernstein complained,

The author [Héritier] obviously describes the events from the perspective of the social revolutionaries grouped around Blanqui. One has to doubt, however, whether their plans really fit the situation and whether, when executed and supported by the other revolutionaries, they would have brought about the desired result. They were based on the superstition that "the people" as a whole was a homogeneous mass with identical wishes or at least identical interests and that it was merely a matter of bringing to power, by a sudden attack, a government of determined revolutionaries in place of the bourgeois government in order to found the true republic corresponding to these supposed interests. The

<sup>2</sup>Bernstein, "Nachtrag und Anmerkungen" to Louis Héritier, *Geschichte der Französischen Revolution von 1848 und der Zweiten Republik in volkstümlicher Darstellung*, W. Eichhoff and Eduard Bernstein, eds. (Stuttgart, n.d. [1897]), pp. 333, 388f., 696-698, 702, 704, and 711.

course of the demonstration described here showed precisely that this was not so.

Bernstein described how "the people" were divided.<sup>3</sup>

To Bernstein's way of thinking, instead of revolting against the National Assembly in June 1848, the course allegedly encouraged by the radical club politicians, the laborers should have supported the government. Bernstein thought that it was wrong to generalize upon Marx's statement that no improvements were possible for the proletariat under a bourgeois republic, that on this issue Marx had not yet overcome the socialist dogmas of the day, that he would later do so in England. In Bernstein's opinion, the government's abolishing the National Workshops involved no serious harm to the proletariat. He maintained that the uprising in June 1848 was not a true class struggle of the workers against the bourgeoisie and that the proletariat had no vital economic interest at stake. According to Bernstein, many who sympathized with the working class fought against the rebellion. Many who joined it were misguided by irresponsible press or club demagogues. Many stayed home because they realized the futility of the uprising—that it could win nothing the workers had not already gained with the Republic. Bernstein wrote,

The purely political obstacles for liberating the proletariat had fallen, the economic ones could not be abolished with barricades. As Marx said in the "Class Struggles": "Neither its immediate avowed needs drove the proletariat in June to fight for the demise of the bourgeoisie with violent means, nor was it up to the task." All socialists who thought more deeply saw this more or less clearly, and many workers did the same.<sup>4</sup>

Significantly, here Bernstein appealed to Marx's analysis of French society in 1848. In seeking to counter Héritier's portrayal of the Revolution, Bernstein repeatedly utilized arguments from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and particularly from *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*. According to Bernstein, Marx correctly noted the weakness of the French proletariat in 1848 because of the early stage of French industry; Marx correctly realized the

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 365-367, 702, and 706f. The quotation is on p. 365.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 528-535 and 709f. The quotation is on p. 533.

February Revolution to be one of peasants, laborers, and petite bourgeoisie against an aristocracy of finance; and Marx correctly exposed the mistakes of his contemporaries who confused the latter financial group with the bourgeoisie and who accordingly mistook the popular victory in February for a proletarian triumph.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, if Marx accurately determined that neither the French working class nor material conditions in 1848 were ready for the end of the bourgeois republic and capitalism and the establishing of proletarian rule and socialism, then why at one point did he find Blanqui or his associates real leaders of the proletariat? From Bernstein's perspective there did exist an answer to this question, but it was an answer which contradicted Marx's analysis as presented here so far. In a passage strikingly similar to his Fabian address, Bernstein explained,

In his Introduction to the "Class Struggles" Friedrich Engels openly stated that in 1848 Marx and he had significantly overestimated the degree of social development reached and the speed of its progress; that their understanding back then—that the next crisis would bring a new edition of the revolution and in the course of this, after a series of inevitable struggles between the classes opposed to the bourgeoisie, would give the proletariat the role of the decisive factor—rested on a misinterpretation of the economic circumstances; how it was not clear to them that "the state of economic development on the Continent was nowhere near ripe for the removal of capitalist production." In other words, Marx and he did not think quite so optimistically as the mass of the French socialists, but nonetheless much more optimistically than the state of economic development justified. But now it is clear that judgment about subjective means must conform to insight into the objective possibilities and the thereby determined importance of the various social

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 283 and 700f. For other discussion of Bernstein's work on Hérítier see also Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 25 and 142-147, or Bo Gustafsson, *Marxismus und Revisionismus*. *Eduard Bernsteins Kritik des Marxismus und ihre ideengeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*, Holger Heide, tr. (Frankfurt/M., 1972), pp. 91-100. Both emphasize differences between Bernstein's analysis and the views of Marx. On p. 146 Meyer relates how in 1921 Bernstein recalled his Hérítier study as an important source of revisionism.

classes. This all the more when the person making the judgment was as logical a theoretician as Marx. What he rejected because he thought capitalist society already near collapse, he would have necessarily had to deny less sharply if he had known what a great amount of work capitalist production in 1848 still had ahead. At any rate, socialist history-writing today, as much as it is indebted to his masterly analysis of the driving forces of the February Revolution, may accept his conclusions without reservation only where they have not been influenced by mistakes in his presuppositions.

Here was what Bernstein had attempted—to affirm the part of the analysis which rested on an accurate appraisal of material conditions but to reject conclusions based on an overestimation of those conditions.<sup>6</sup> Far from his approach being deliberately anti-Marxist, Bernstein could sincerely believe that it was what Engels's 1895 confession required.

Bernstein associated the crucial overestimation with several mistakes. Marx had written that economic instability would strengthen the revolution. Bernstein doubted that under modern economic relationships chaos provided the best circumstances for erecting new institutions. He thereby challenged the popular socialist assumption that capitalism would need to collapse before socialism was possible. Bernstein believed that overestimating conditions in France had led Marx to think mistakenly that the radical clubs were the proletariat's true leaders:

Therefore if Marx, who so excellently deduces the lack of maturity of the French proletariat in 1848 from the lack of maturity of the economic conditions—the backwardness of the development of production—in France, nevertheless sees in the clubs the representatives of the working class, then this is a contradiction which may be explained by the error Engels recognized as such but is nevertheless still a contradiction which one cannot quietly disregard today. The radicalism of the clubs did not at all fit the given interests of the working

<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, "Nachtrag und Anmerkungen," pp. 699-701. That Bernstein perceived himself to be using one side of Marxism is mentioned by Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 146.

class; the politics of the clubs cannot be explained by these interests, rather by the illusions and ambitions of the club leaders who for the most part did not belong to the proletariat at all.<sup>7</sup>

Bernstein rejected one half of the paradox he saw in Marx's analysis of the 1848 Revolution--finding the club demagogues or Blanqui representative of the proletariat because of an overestimation of material conditions. However, Bernstein supported the other half--a careful analysis of the existing material conditions and the moderate reforms made possible and necessary by them.

Marx had mentioned the radical clubs in his discussion of the May 15, 1848, attack on the National Assembly. Now Bernstein sought to provide a further account of the clubs and their role in the Revolution. He implied that Blanqui's group was socialistic only in its utopian vision. Its immediate goals were less proletarian ones than ones typical of political radicalism. The social-revolutionary clubs had influence on the workers, in Bernstein's opinion, because no proletarian party existed at the time; later, Blanqui's organization proved unable to become a real labor party. Bernstein claimed,

The mass of the Blanquists cared little about the specific interests of the workers; they understood but little of the economic side of the workers' movement; they looked more with hostility upon the first stirring of the trade-union and cooperative movements. From the beginning there existed an opposition between the workers who supported the "Luxembourg" and those who formed the chorus of the clubs, an opposition which from then on in all kinds of shades and variations moves through the entire history of the French socialist workers' movement. Thus in the year 1848 the "Luxembourg," meaning Louis Blanc and his followers, and not the Blanquists must in our opinion be considered the center of the French workers' movement, the kernel of the proletarian party.

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<sup>7</sup>Bernstein, "Nachtrag und Anmerkungen," p. 708.

When Bernstein argued that the Luxembourg looked forward and studied actual conditions while the radical club members looked backwards to the French Revolution, he tacitly contrasted historical materialism with utopianism. Bernstein warned how the terms "proletariat" and "people" were employed in a fetishistic, "melodramatic" manner which Marx condemned in 1850, as Bernstein had also pointed out in his Fabian speech.<sup>8</sup>

Bernstein could believe that the truly Marxist approach to Marx's mid-century writings acknowledged their correction by Marx and Engels and that one should follow the mature Marxism of Marx's advanced texts and of Engels, not ideas expressed under exceptional circumstances and later judged inaccurate by Marx and Engels themselves. Yet, Bernstein had now conceded that Marx had actually written that Blanqui represented the proletariat in 1848 and that economic crises prepared the way for social revolution. Perhaps the concession helped Bernstein to decide that Marxism contained, or had once contained, a Blanquist element after all.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 365, 701f., and 714. For the idea of a "melodramatic use" of the term "proletariat" (p. 714), Bernstein was indebted to Shaw. See earlier, 269; later, 330-332; and EB-KK December 7, 1896. Significantly, Bernstein claimed that Marx and Engels disapproved of using the term in a fetishistic fashion; here and also above, 302f. See also below, 385f.

<sup>9</sup>Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Die Herausbildung des Revisionismus von Eduard Bernstein im Lichte des Briefwechsels Bernstein-Kautsky," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, p. 45, argues that it was in his study of Héritier and the 1848 Revolution that Bernstein began to associate Marxism with Blanquism, and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat with "jakobinische Anarchie." On p. 46 Steinberg observes that many in the SPD could not comprehend the association.



## D. The "Problems of Socialism" Series Continued

Back when *Justice* reviewed his speech to the Fabian Society, Bernstein had written a letter to Kautsky which reflected his disgust with the SDF and his corresponding admiration for the Fabians. In this letter of February 7, 1897, Bernstein expressed his dislike of Hyndman and his desire to avoid the SDF. He talked about how the situation in England showed that using the German schema did not work. For example, the Liberal Party had not died. Bernstein implied that the Fabians were more advanced than the Germans in employing the historical-materialist method. He recommended an article by Sidney Webb on trade-union tactics. Bernstein added, "Bax is right, I am a Fabian, for they are the only socialists here from whom one can learn anything. The others are utopians or commonplace agitators."<sup>1</sup>

Bernstein did not mean that he was abandoning mature Marxism for an anti-Marxist Fabianism. On the contrary, he praised the Fabians for carrying out the objective social research which he believed lay at the heart of historical materialism. Ironically, Bernstein berated the so-called Marxists of England and approved some of the supposed anti-Marxists there because he thought that the latter followed a methodology closer to mature Marxism than were the former's utopian fantasies.

In his continuation of the "Problems of Socialism" series, Bernstein criticized a methodology like that allegedly followed by the SDF and the correspondingly inaccurate evaluation of British politics. His article on agrarian conditions in England insisted on precisely that which the utopian approach neglected: a careful study of social facts and their political ramifications. Bernstein jested,

How important it is for every theory to keep informed at all times about the actual process of development needs no further explanation. The anecdote about the physician who categorically declares to a patient whom he had given up but who had nonetheless survived, "For science you are dead," is a warning not only for hasty young Aesculapians.

West European agriculture had repeatedly been given up for dead, for example; yet, it survived. In Bernstein's opinion, England was an

<sup>1</sup>EB-KK February 7, 1897. The letter is also cited by Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 31.

excellent land in which to study this development because English agriculture enjoyed little protection, because ocean shipping could supply the cities, and because there was no specialty produce to which farmers could take refuge. Agriculture there had to compete at the world market price and yet was managing not only to survive but even to establish itself on a secure footing.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing upon a recently published book on agriculture in England, Bernstein maintained that the rural proletariat was actually becoming a smaller percentage of the total population, largely because of migration from the countryside to the cities or overseas. The ease of movement secured agricultural workers a decent wage. Bernstein believed that in many instances their living and working conditions had improved and that on the average agrarian laborers were better off than small holders. Most significantly, Bernstein reported that there were only about one million agrarian wage workers in England compared to roughly 300,000 self-employed persons. Moreover, the recent agricultural crisis had allowed tenants to become more independent; and the fall in world food prices had been borne by the landlords, who had suffered a collapse in rents. Bernstein referred to the process as a partial "expropriation of the expropriators."<sup>3</sup>

For Bernstein, these changes accounted for a revolution in domestic politics. Formerly the tenants had supported the Liberal Party against the landlords. Now the tenants joined with the landowners in the Conservative Party, while the rural workers were represented by the Liberals. Bernstein did not name (but undoubtedly thought of) the SDF when he criticized certain English socialists for ignoring the profound shift:

It is astonishing, and a sign of how conservative in their arguments precisely the most radical parties often are, that even in England today one still finds socialists who take their criticism of the Liberals from the literature of the forties. In conjunction with this, the economic situation is depicted as if the process of development had been exactly the way it presented itself at that time. But history knows no development according to a schema (Schablone); it knows only

<sup>2</sup>Bernstein, "Die neuere Entwicklung der Agrarverhältnisse in England," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 772f.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 774-776 and 779-781.

developmental tendencies which determine its direction without however imposing themselves in complete purity.<sup>4</sup>

Bernstein had asserted that the rural proletariat in England was not increasing substantially in number. He also argued that a large number of people retained an interest in preserving private property. He asked,

But what about the class of "landowners"? Is the distribution of landed property such that it corresponds to the often-met picture: here a handful of big estate owners, there small proprietors and propertyless? Here too we must beware of exaggerations lest we arrive at conclusions which the course of development will prove lies.

From a book of statistics, Bernstein reported that in the United Kingdom there were over 176,000 owners of more than ten acres of land. He added that this figure failed to reflect the true number of persons concerned about keeping private property in land because groups like foundations, stock companies, and cooperatives were normally listed as one owner. Mortgage holders had an interest in landed property; so did owners of ten or fewer acres. Bernstein estimated that Great Britain and Ireland had at least one million landowners, and he believed that the group would resist nationalization.<sup>5</sup>

To someone who read *Capital*, the *Anti-Dühring*, and the Erfurt Program as exact descriptions of a process of capitalist development nearing completion before proletarian rule and socialism could occur, Bernstein's argument might have seemed anti-socialist. Nationalization of the land would appear unlikely in the foreseeable future; political opposition from the landholders would seem to threaten socialization of other means of production too. But such a reading was not the only one possible. In his 1892 commentary on the Erfurt Program, Kautsky had allowed that through personal sacrifice the small producer might survive in competition with large-scale production. During his debates with David, Kautsky had admitted that capital development in some branches of industry or agriculture could support small-scale

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 776. See earlier, 117-119.

<sup>5</sup>Bernstein, "Die neuere Entwicklung in England," p. 777.

production in other areas. In his article on Polish nationalism, Kautsky had recognized that small-scale production was continuing even in industry, maintaining a middle class which could wield significant political power to a conservative end. He would want social democracy to cooperate with middle class parties to complete the democratic republic.<sup>6</sup>

The political side of the question concerned Bernstein more. If particular economic developments produced a political environment in which nationalization was unfeasible for the near future, then social democrats would need to search for other immediate demands which did fit the material conditions. Bernstein wrote Kautsky on February 7, 1897,

Much more important from my perspective is the question which consequences for the whole tactics and practical action of the party derive from the insight, which we . . . cannot shut our eyes to, that the concentration of firms in industry and agriculture . . . is not developing in the quick and uniform way that our theory predicted. I am just broaching . . . the question and am curious whether a discussion will ensue. I have no great expectations, . . .<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, here Bernstein identified "our theory" of the SPD with a one-sided interpretation of this theory.

In opposition to the latter, Bernstein essentially adapted Kautsky's argument against David to conditions in Great Britain. Imported grain played the role of capital concentration, freeing people to move to more labor-intensive forms of agriculture. Bernstein implicitly rejected David's argument against Kautsky, for Bernstein

<sup>6</sup>See earlier, 66f., 91-93, 204f. It is difficult to imagine that Kautsky did not peruse Bernstein's essay carefully. Kautsky edited *Neue Zeit*. He had been deeply involved in the agrarian controversy and was currently writing a book on the topic.

<sup>7</sup>EB-KK February 7, 1897. In "Herausbildung des Revisionismus," pp. 44f., Steinberg traces the question of the speed of economic development.

believed that the transition from large-size to medium-size farms in England did not represent a decrease in the amount of capital used on each farm. Bernstein summarized the results of his research, saying

that the idea must be given up for the time being that the rural question would come to such a crisis that it could be solved one day quasi with a single blow by expropriating a "handful" of landed magnates and capitalist giant farmers. Aside from the fact that the million employees in agriculture are spread out over a large area, they also constitute a much less homogeneous work force than the wage laborers in industry. The socialist solution to the rural question seems to want to arrive via a different route.<sup>8</sup>

Bernstein drew two conclusions. First, politics could affect the economy profoundly. Democracy in Great Britain had forced the landowners to bear the losses to overseas competition and had forestalled laws prohibiting emigration of rural labor, for example. Second, against the temptation to utopian speculation, Bernstein stressed the need always to base policies on the facts of social development—the fundamental thesis of the entire "Problems" series:

The truth is not always pleasant, but it is always useful. It teaches us to address with full power those tasks which we are able to accomplish and protects us from dreaming how to carry out immediately solutions for which the preconditions have not been reached.<sup>9</sup>

In this way of thinking, nationalization of the land could occur only when the material conditions for it had been achieved; until these preconditions of socialism (*Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus*) had been realized, one should seek more practicable reforms.

<sup>8</sup>Bernstein, "Die neuere Entwicklung in England," pp. 777-781. Compare earlier, 93 and 105f. The argument is also summarized by Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 213. On Bernstein's observation that tendencies identified by Marx met counter-tendencies and on the continued importance of middle-sized firms, see Gay, pp. 170 and 208.

<sup>9</sup>Bernstein, "Die neuere Entwicklung in England," pp. 782f.

Bernstein thought that many were possible, for he believed that Great Britain was entering a period of extensive proletarian influence in government, a time when socialization of monopolies and other steps appropriate to a gradual transition to socialism could occur. But the reforms needed to be appropriate ones—fitting both the present material conditions and the future requirements of a socialist society. The SDF was proud of its program of immediate demands. Besides the nationalization of land and of the railroads, the SDF called for a more liberal poor law and for government support of all school children (like that possibly proposed by Keir Hardie at the London Congress). These demands presupposed a powerful state dealing with individuals directly. In late 1896 and early 1897 the SDF flailed at the Fabians for opposing the referendum and defending the government bureaucracy.<sup>10</sup> In the fifth article of his "Problems" series, titled "The Social and Political Significance of Space and Number," Bernstein found reforms like those desired by the SDF to be inappropriate.

First Bernstein challenged those social democrats who refused seriously to consider important social and political problems of the future or to approach them using the methods of historical materialism. He complained,

In current socialist discussions daring to go beyond questions of the morrow, certain points are treated with noticeable indifference and superficiality or are disregarded altogether—points which are of greatest importance for a social doctrine which claims to be scientific: the problem of social-political regional units and, closely connected to it, the problem of social-political responsibilities.

Bernstein contended that some earlier socialist theorists had carefully studied such problems. He implied that these questions were no longer discussed extensively in part because of a misreading of Engels's *Anti-Dühring*. The SPD followed a policy of transforming the state and

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, *Justice*, October 12, 1895, pp. 4f.; October 24, 1896, p. 4; November 7, 1896, p. 1; December 19, 1896, p. 1; March 13, 1897, p. 1; March 27, p. 4; and June 5, 1897, p. 4. A. M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 72 and 75-77, contrasts the positions of the SDF in the late 1880's and of Webb in late 1896.



using its power; but even among German social democrats, the misreading had led some simply to dismiss the state. Bernstein wrote,

One not only fights against the state insofar as it is the support for specific exploitive interests but also shies away from giving room to the idea of a state other than the feudalistic or bourgeois-capitalistic. One is not so bound by doctrine to fear handing over to the state specific social tasks, but one wants to hear nothing of the idea that the state itself could become socialistic some day. With the triumph of socialism the state ceases, and then begins the socialist--society.

To try to prove that Engels had been misinterpreted, Bernstein provided several arguments: Allegedly, Engels had addressed his remarks against a socialist cult of the state, a bureaucratic approach to socialism. He wished to have state functions replaced with democratic self-administration. Bernstein admitted that such administration would no longer constitute a "state" in the sense of a "power standing above the totality of the nation" and independent of its will and needs, but he believed that this situation merely called for a less strict use of the term "state." To Bernstein, the term "society" was too vague and met justified skepticism, especially when one portrayed the future "communist society" accomplishing immense tasks with few social responsibilities imposed on its members. To help clarify the language problem, Kautsky attached a note suggesting the term "commonwealth."<sup>11</sup>

Bernstein recited the standard argument against the communist society's needing legally enforced duties: Future society would evolve out of present material conditions. Collective production fostered group solidarity, a sense of duty, and a tendency for the individual's

<sup>11</sup> Bernstein, "Die sozialpolitische Bedeutung von Raum und Zahl," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 100-103. Compare earlier, 306. Analysis of the article appears in Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 153f., where Meyer sees Bernstein providing further support for his thesis in favor of gradual social change; see also pp. 213f. and 325 in Meyer. On Bernstein and the views of Marx and Engels on the state, see also Helmut Dahm, "Macht und Gewalt im deutschen und russischen Sozialismus," in *Die Gewalt in Politik, Religion und Gesellschaft*, Eduard J. M. Kroker, ed. (Stuttgart, 1976), pp. 31-38.

interests to coincide with the common interest. More public education, greater public services, and the removal of legal privilege all tended in the same direction. Bernstein questioned not that such tendencies existed but that they should be taken as soon-to-be accomplished facts:

Beside them other very strong factors act in the opposite direction and undo a number of their effects to a large extent. To these factors belong the repercussions of spatial aspects and population increase on the rest of the social and economic life of nations.<sup>12</sup>

Bernstein believed that the two powerful counter-tendencies of space and number meant that for the near future, society would need structures resembling the modern state. Though better transportation was overcoming distances, individuals still could not see a greater amount of space, Bernstein argued. The means of production and the workers were still tied to a locality; a larger population would make possible further division of labor, which would demand more supervisory personnel; administrative territories would need to be delimited. Here was the problem of "the society" as raised by space. The problem as raised by number was that of millions of people needing to decide detailed administrative questions. Bernstein rejected the anarchist approach of dissolving society into small units, for he suspected that it would result in a localized property worse than private property. He thought that direct democracy provided no alternative to knowledgeable officials in running complex socialized enterprises like the railroads. A numerous and mobile society would weaken the force of public opinion on the individual and thereby allow higher frequency of behavior against the common good, Bernstein feared, especially apparent in the failure of persons to perform social responsibilities. Both to enforce public duties and to punish criminal actions, the society would need laws and law enforcement.<sup>13</sup>

On these observations Bernstein based several recommendations for social-democratic policy; in doing so, he recalled concerns mentioned in his articles and correspondence in mid-1896. On the one hand, social democrats should support the trade-union and cooperative movements because they nurtured a sense of group solidarity and

<sup>12</sup> Bernstein, "Raum und Zahl," p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-106.

mutual responsibility. On the other hand, social democrats should not endorse reforms which could "teach the population to be beggars." Both guidelines were probably against SDF ideas. Bernstein quoted from the statutes of the First International the phrase "no rights without duties" and worried about social-democratic agitation which spoke often of claims made by the individual on the community but seldom of the reverse. Bernstein then asked what had become for him the urgent question: If in the near future social democracy were to come to power, be it from an unexpected catastrophe or not, could the society meet these new expectations? Could it "take over from individuals the duty of self-maintenance?"<sup>14</sup>

Bernstein investigated what proletarian rule might accomplish given the current stage of economic development. He believed that production would remain decentralized. Again applying an argument like Kautsky's against David, Bernstein insisted,

... that in no way does the development of production move exclusively in the direction of concentration and centralization of firms; that the tendency to large and giant firms may well predominate in industry but does not succeed everywhere; and that, in addition, with the progress in technology and the increased productive power of labor, new branches of production continually spring to life next to the old ones, so that despite increasing consolidation of firms, the decrease in the total number is barely noticeable.

Bernstein estimated that in 1921 some 60,000 large or middle-sized businesses would remain in German industry alone. In addition, there would be the large and middle-sized farms. Social control of production would necessitate highly developed administrative machinery which could not be created overnight. Bernstein doubted that an automatic harmonizing of interests would occur. So he thought that to protect the common good there would need to be officials and to prevent arbitrariness in supervision there would need to be general rules, or laws. In short, for the foreseeable future the society would require something like a state.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 106 and 138f. Compare earlier, 185f.

<sup>15</sup>Bernstein, "Raum und Zahl," pp. 139f. See earlier, 91-93, 159, and 252. See Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 154f., on

Bernstein believed that for the immediate future neither an unlimited right to employment nor an end to one's responsibility for one's own economic maintenance would be possible. He wrote,

Except for pressing emergencies and that work for the community for which all members of the society are obliged to take their turn, the duty to work can be maintained only on the basis of the rule that whoever does not work shall not eat, i.e., by retaining the principle of economic self-responsibility that is already valid today.

Therefore it should not be expected at all that a future social order will abolish the duty of economic self-responsibility. Socialism can merely make its realization easier. And more is not even desirable. Self-responsibility is, as is well known, only one side of a social principle, the other side of which is called personal freedom. One cannot be conceived without the other. As contradictory as it may sound, the idea of removing self-responsibility is profoundly anti-socialist. Its alternative would be either complete tyranny or dissolution of any social order.

Bernstein judged it utopian to think that a revolution could turn the state into an "institution for automatically providing maintenance."<sup>16</sup> A fear that loss of individual economic responsibility could lead to loss of individual freedom would help explain Bernstein's opposition to that socialist agitation which seemed to encourage workers to depend on government handouts.

In his article on space and time, Bernstein described the importance to him of the trade unions and cooperatives for teaching the social responsibility that would be crucial for the future society. Trade unions, cooperatives, and units of local government would also serve as public institutions intermediate between the individual citizen and the society as a whole, thereby helping preserve democracy. Kautsky had endorsed "municipal socialism" in the present. Bernstein predicted that local government would have an important role in the future, too:

Bernstein as denying the prognosis of social development dominant in the SPD. See Meyer, p. 313, on Bernstein's views concerning a complex society needing a state.

<sup>16</sup>Bernstein, "Raum und Zahl," p. 141.

The state or any analogous central administration, if left to itself, would by and large stand helpless before the enormous mass of production plants, the number of which we presented above. Space and number would prevent any more than superficial intervention in the economy. But if the self-administration bodies are brought in, the whole picture changes. The gigantic problem of space disappears, and the numerical relationships become more human. However, even with that the "state" still does not become superfluous.

In effect, Bernstein rejected the SDF approach to "municipal socialism," looking at its role in the present society alone, in favor of the one taken by the Fabians of considering the tasks of local government in a socialist order. Nonetheless, Bernstein emphasized that in considering the issue of federalism--of decentralizing the state without destroying the national unit--Marx had led the way in his *The Civil War in France*, as Bernstein had already mentioned in his Fabian speech and in the 1896 article on Proudhon.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Bernstein, "Raum und Zahl," pp. 142f. For Kautsky on "municipal socialism," see earlier, 61f. and 86. For Bernstein on Marx's alleged federalism see earlier, 189 and 305f.

#### E. Shaw and "The Illusions of Socialism"

During his controversy with Kautsky in September and October 1896, Kanner had published a second article by Shaw. Titled "The Illusions of Socialism," for irony it rivaled his account of the London Congress, where the author had praised socialists for unrealistic goals making possible everyday reforms. Bax criticized the second essay. In contrast, Kautsky appreciated its contents, while disapproving of its appearing in *Die Zeit*. On November 4, 1896, Kautsky wrote Adler,

In essence Shaw's article says nothing that each of us has not said a hundred times to ourselves and others, only with the difference that Shaw exaggerates beyond all measure, in the manner of Mark Train, and that we publish our criticism only if and to the extent it seems to serve our cause, whereas such considerations do not exist for Mr. Shaw. While his article can be explained somewhat by conditions in England, it becomes insidious when it appears in an Austrian bourgeois newspaper which has just declared war on social democracy. The good effect that self-criticism might have on our own people is lost--it is totally different for a friend to call me a jackass than for an enemy to do so. Not our people are elevated thereby, but our adversaries; not the insight of the former, but the self-esteem of the latter.

A reprinting of "The Illusions of Socialism" in a collection provided opportunity for yet another 1897 publication of Bernstein prompted by the debates with Bax and Kanner in late 1896. Bernstein's *Neue Zeit* review of Shaw appeared in June 1897.<sup>1</sup>

Like his article on the London Congress, Shaw's "The Illusions of Socialism" was in essence an attack on thinking like that in the SDF. Shaw began by arguing that illusions were necessary to motivate

<sup>1</sup>Kautsky to Adler November 4, 1896, in Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 218. According to Hulse, p. 135, Shaw's article appeared in the New York periodical, *The Home Journal*, October 21 and 28, 1896.

Both Hulse, pp. 135f., and Gustafsson, *Marxismus und Revisionismus*, pp. 158f., also summarize the article.

For Shaw's criticism of the London Congress, see earlier, 265-269. Ernest Belfort Bax, "Our Fabian Philosopher," *Justice*, November 28, 1896, p. 6.



individuals to action. Without them young people would never marry, and many would abandon the struggle for socialism. Bad illusions existed, Shaw admitted, including those of socialists who commonly accused their "capitalist" opponents of hypocrisy or worse. However, he wished to consider those illusions supposedly required to make scientific thought exciting and comprehensible to the average person.<sup>2</sup>

According to Shaw, socialism showed scientifically the manner in which to achieve the fundamental values of the American Declaration of Independence—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The values themselves were dogma; but the best way to realize them needed to be uncovered through the scientific study of society. Shaw believed that socialism differed from other democratic systems sharing the three values in that socialism saw "industrial collectivism" as the "political science of democracy." Hence like other sciences when they desired public support, socialism required dramatic and religious illusion to excite people's interest and then scientific illusion to satisfy their intellects. Shaw explained,

The dramatic illusion of socialism is that which presents the working-class as a virtuous hero and heroine in the toils of a villain called "the capitalist," suffering terribly and struggling nobly, but with a happy ending for them, and a fearful retribution for the villain, in full view before the fall of the curtain on a future of undisturbed bliss. . . .

Closely allied to the dramatic illusion and indeed at bottom the same thing, is the religious illusion. This illusion presents socialism as consummating itself by a great day of wrath, called "The Revolution," in which capitalism, commercialism, competition, and all the lusts of the Exchange, shall be brought to judgment and cast out, leaving the earth free for the kingdom of heaven on earth, all of which is revealed in an infallible book by a great prophet and leader. In this illusion the capitalist is not a stage villain, but the devil; Socialism is not the happy ending of a drama, but heaven; and Karl Marx's "Das Kapital" is "the Bible of the working-classes."

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<sup>2</sup>G. Bernard Shaw, "The Illusions of Socialism," in *Forecasts of the Coming Century*, Edward Carpenter, ed. (Manchester, 1897), pp. 141-151.

Shaw warned that such illusions became dangerous when social democrats mistook them for reality:

For when the reality at last comes to the men who have been nursed on dramatizations of it, they do not recognize it. Its prosaic aspect revolts them; and since it must necessarily come by penurious installments, each maimed in the inevitable compromise with powerful hostile interests, its advent has neither the splendid magnitude nor the absolute integrity of principle dramatically and religiously necessary to impress them. Hence they either pass it by contemptuously or join the forces of reaction by opposing it vehemently. Worse still, to prevent the recurrence of such scandals, and maintain the purity of their faith, they begin to set up rigid tests of orthodoxy; to excommunicate the genuinely scientific Socialists; to entrust the leadership of their organizations to orators and preachers: in short, to develop all the symptoms of what the French call *Impossibilism*.

Shaw explicitly accused some in the SDF of holding the dramatic and religious illusions.<sup>3</sup>

Shaw then turned to his other type of necessary illusion, "that which supplies the demand for a theory, not only as a sort of trapeze for the intellect, but as a scientific basis for faith." According to Shaw's analysis, socialists still clung to the older theory of value, stated in Marx's *Capital* volume one, because it provided a scientific illusion; it also aroused moral passion against capitalism. In contrast, the scientific value theory of Jevons was difficult to popularize and was "indifferent to the moral sense." Shaw maintained that in the third volume of *Capital* Marx himself had radically modified his theory, that the older value theory was erroneous, that if true it would disprove surplus value, and that critics had repeatedly cited it to discredit socialism.<sup>4</sup>

In reviewing "The Illusions of Socialism," Bernstein sought to place Shaw's opinions about social democracy into their English setting. Bernstein doubted that many outside Great Britain understood the article, since it was so thoroughly tied to the peculiar problems there.

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 151-160.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 163-173.

One especially needed to allow for Shaw's personality and his dislike for the SDF and their attempt to apply Continental social democracy, as they envisioned it, directly to England. Bernstein wrote,

Shaw is one of the oldest and, in the view of the writer of these lines, most sincere members of the present English socialist movement. With a native Irish wit which in him is even more intensified, he realized early on the fallacy of attempting to conquer a country which had experienced its 1848 over 200 years ago with an essentially pre-'48 revolutionary romanticism; and he would not be Irish if he had not kicked over the traces in the other direction. Thus he became the sharpest adversary of Hyndman, of the most highly regarded English follower of Marx. Whether the tactical antagonism has something to do with Shaw's conversion to Jevons's theory of value will not be discussed here; it may well have contributed to making Shaw and his like-minded friends more open to the sequence of ideas leading to Jevonsism.

Here Bernstein suggested that some Fabians might follow marginal utility theory at least in part because of Hyndman's manner of representing Marxism, much as earlier Bernstein had allowed that the Fabians' eclecticism resulted in part from a reaction against a sectarian and utopian approach which discredited theory. Bernstein expected that despite Shaw's ironical and complicated arguments most German social democrats would accept the rejection of dramatic and religious illusions. He believed that the intellectual leadership had already disavowed them. Perhaps Shaw's attack on those who glorified the proletariat and vilified the bourgeoisie particularly attracted Bernstein since Bax defended employing such characterizations.<sup>5</sup>

Then Bernstein added a significant passage about Shaw's criticism of the other kind of "necessary illusion":

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<sup>5</sup>Bernstein, "Zwei politische Programm-Symphonien," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 337f. Bax, "Our Fabian Philosopher," p. 6. On Bernstein's use of the concept of a "melodramatic presentation of the proletariat," see earlier, 269 and 317. On sectarian utopianism as a cause of the Fabians' eclecticism, see earlier, 274f. On p. 37 Pelling reports that Shaw had changed to Jevons's theory by 1885. On the Fabians rejecting the labor theory of value because of the SDF, see McBriar, p. 35.

In contrast, the comments about the scientific claims or the scientific illusion of socialism will meet with major objections; but whoever goes to the trouble of reflecting more precisely on the relationship between science and socialism, as much as they may differ from Shaw in details, will come to agree with Shaw's main idea--namely, that what we usually call the science of socialism does not deserve that name. For instance, is "Capital" a work of socialist science? Not at all. It is a scientific analysis of bourgeois production; but at no point where it is scientific is it specifically socialist, rather wants to be free of all bias. Only a few conclusions are specifically socialist; but as in the final chapter of the first volume of "Capital," they are kept very aphoristic and claim nothing more than to lay out general tendencies. The theory of value and all the more detailed explorations of "Capital" built upon it leave socialist theory untouched. They say what is, not what should be. Science cannot be a party matter; parties can only derive their conclusions from the results of science and in most cases will accept only that which fits their needs.<sup>6</sup>

Bernstein had touched on the relationship of socialism to science, a question explored in his 1901 address "How Is Scientific Socialism Possible?"<sup>7</sup> However, to comprehend Bernstein's reasoning four years earlier, one may study the above passage in its immediate context--that of a review of an article by Shaw published in Europe in the midst of an intense polemic with the SDF and Liebknecht. One should remember both that in 1897 Bernstein was still fighting this battle and that over the course of 1897 he was gradually coming to associate terms like "Marxism" and "scientific socialism" more with the ideas of Hyndman, Bax, and Liebknecht than with those of Kautsky.

In his "The Illusions of Socialism" Shaw had distinguished between illusory and truly scientific understandings. Shaw himself had argued that socialism was authentically scientific: One should objectively study actual material conditions to discover the best method of realizing the socialist goal. Would Kautsky have even partially

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<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, "Zwei Programm-Symphonien," p. 338.

<sup>7</sup>Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 33f., points to a connection from the 1897 review article to the 1901 speech.

approved the content of Shaw's article if it had rejected scientific socialism in this sense? Shaw's ironic attack on "the scientific illusion of socialism" meant not that he denied socialism could be scientific but rather that he believed some socialists continued to use an outdated theory because it helped popularize the results of scientific investigation or because it better excited people.

No doubt, Bernstein appreciated Shaw's distinguishing between the SDF's approach allegedly based on illusions and a truly scientific socialism. In his review of Hyndman's economics text in 1896, Bernstein had allowed that Hyndman's theory was good for agitation, for moving the masses with a condemnation of capitalism. However, Bernstein had argued that Hyndman had not provided a scientific analysis of capitalism.<sup>8</sup> The distinction resembled the one Shaw drew between the "scientific illusion" and the true science of socialism. To Bernstein *Capital* was not a "science of socialism" in the illusory sense. It did not set forth one necessary future development, beyond listing general tendencies. Instead, Bernstein found *Capital* scientific in the proper sense in that it sought to describe objectively how capitalism operated. It would appear that Bernstein had again rejected utopianism in favor of mature Marxism.

The essays Bernstein published in early 1897 continued many of the key themes of 1896; they continued his defense of a mature Marxism against what he perceived to be misinterpretations of Marx. However, in early 1897 there appeared an element in Bernstein's writings which would have profound consequences by the year's end. Slowly Bernstein came to associate terms like "Marxism," "social-democratic thought," and "scientific socialism" with views of Liebknecht, Hyndman, or Bax. The "Marxism" Bernstein criticized was their alleged utopianism or sectarianism. He had long opposed their opinions; he would still seek to defend ideas he shared with Kautsky. But in part he transferred the title "Marxism" from the latter ideas to the former opinions. The change in Bernstein's thinking may have been prompted by his editing of Hérítier and acknowledging that Marx had once recognized Blanqui a proletarian leader and had reckoned economic collapse a prelude to revolution. Perhaps to himself Bernstein justified the change with Engels's 1895 confession that he and Marx had held such views in 1848-50 but had been mistaken in their assessment of material conditions. The change

<sup>8</sup>Bernstein, "Sozialistische Oekonomie in England," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 47. And above, 271 note 1.

surfaced in the continuation of the "Problems of Socialism" series. It was strengthened with the review of Shaw. Debates in 1897 over the crisis in the Ottoman Empire and over the Prussian diet elections further encouraged Bernstein's associating Marxism and social democracy with Hyndman and Liebknecht. By September 1897 Kautsky and Bernstein discovered that they agreed on the ideas they favored and on the theories they opposed; but they no longer concurred on which should be termed "Marxist"; they no longer agreed on the meaning of Marxism.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>From Kautsky's polemic with Bax, Bernstein could recall that even Marx once applied the term "Marxist" to a misinterpretation of his thought. Earlier, 238.



Chapter Seven: Crete and Prussia  
(Spring and Summer 1897)

A. Crete

Since autumn 1896 when Luxemburg and Bernstein had challenged Liebknecht's interpretation of events in the Near East, social democrats had not forgotten the crisis in the Ottoman Empire. By February 1897 more unrest had occurred on Crete. Greece dispatched a military force to the island, but the Powers decided in favor of Cretan autonomy and told Greece to withdraw its forces. With Liebknecht still editor-in-chief, *Vorwärts* continued much the same editorial policy as the year before: The real cause of unrest remained Russia, aided by the contradictory policies of the Powers. In the midst of rising public enthusiasm for Greece and the Cretans, the newspaper observed that at least the SDF perceived the Russian threat.<sup>1</sup>

Bernstein presented another view in his *Neue Zeit* article "Crete," (dated February 18, 1897), which Kautsky thoroughly liked. In the essay Bernstein employed arguments like those used against Liebknecht in the autumn. First, Bernstein defended Greece's assisting the Cretan rebellion. For him, the Cretans possessed as much right to rebel against the Turks as had the Dutch against the Spanish, the Italians against the Austrians, or the Germans in Holstein against the Danes. No violation of Turkish rights occurred, he judged, because Ottoman rule over Crete rested on military conquest; in terms of both ethnic identity and religion, Crete belonged to Greece. Second, Bernstein rejected the supposition that the Czar lurked behind the separation of Crete from Turkey; on the contrary, Bernstein believed that Russia wished to uphold the Ottoman Empire. He warned,

It was Russia that coined the phrase "maintaining the integrity of the Turkish Empire," and those who unconditionally repeat the slogan merely attend to or further the business of the Czar.

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<sup>1</sup>*Vorwärts*, January 10, 1897, p. 1; February 4, 1897, p. 1; February 7, p. 2; February 9, p. 2; February 10, p. 2; February 12, p. 2; February 13, p. 2; February 14, p. 2; February 16, p. 1; February 17, pp. 1f.; February 20, p. 2; February 21, p. 2; February 23, pp. 1f.; February 27, p. 2; March 3, 1897, p. 2.

Bernstein mentioned that the independent nations in the Balkans had not proven as subservient to Russia as had been expected. He believed that strengthening Greece did not fit Russian plans but that Greece might be forced to turn to Russia. Third, Bernstein insisted again that the Ottoman Empire could not survive without certain impossible reforms--impossible because they could not be enacted while the Ottoman government needed violence to control its diverse subject nationalities. Emancipating the "centrifugal" groups would strengthen the Turkish government.<sup>2</sup>

Bernstein provided illustrations for the argument that independence would further the economic advancement of the subject nationalities. Then he returned to his central point--that no abstract right of the Sultan should keep social democrats from sympathizing with the Cretans and Greeks. Only fear of a general European war should do so, Bernstein felt; but he doubted that the danger was so high. Bernstein concluded with an emotional appeal on behalf of Crete's unification with Greece.<sup>3</sup>

As the crisis on Crete climaxed in late February 1897, Kautsky plunged into the debate with an article for *Vorwärts*. He cautioned social democrats not to misuse Marx's statements. Admittedly, Marx and Engels had once backed Turkey against Russia, but by 1878 Marx had decided that without revolution the Ottoman Empire would not be able to oppose Russia. The revolutionary movement had been turned back by the Russians and by the old regime in Turkey, Kautsky continued; it had not received support from the European Powers, where Western capitalists were interested in dominating and exploiting the Near East. According to Kautsky, no class existed which could carry out revolution. Once Russia had tried to win control of Constantinople by encouraging the formation of states out of the Ottoman Empire; but these new governments had proven unreliable; now Russia realized that the Ottoman state itself could be the best vassal of all. Kautsky saw the new policy in Russia's opposition to changes in East Rumelia in 1885, in its refusal to protect the Armenians, and then in its siding with Turkey against Greece. Russia still sought to dominate Constantinople, but it had adapted its methods. Mutual antagonism prevented the other European Powers from stopping

<sup>2</sup>KK-EB February 19, 1897; Bernstein, "Kreta," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 687-689.

<sup>3</sup>Bernstein, "Kreta," pp. 691f. Earlier, 221f.

Russia. Kautsky concluded that social democrats need no longer worry that supporting the subject nationalities of the Ottoman Empire meant aiding Russian despotism.<sup>4</sup>

A speech by Bebel on Wednesday evening, March 3, included ideas similar to those of Kautsky and Bernstein. Before an audience of over 1000, Bebel favored independence for "all the states dominated by the Turks." He believed that there was no strong reform party in the Ottoman Empire and that to support the subject nationalities was to support cultural advance. Social democrats favored self-determination for all peoples; they should seek that the Cretans' received their wish for union with Greece, though not at the cost of a European war.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the success of Kautsky and Bernstein's arguments contributed to the vehemence of Liebknecht's reply in *Vorwärts* March 10: The important difference between them, in Liebknecht's opinion, was that Kautsky believed Russian policy had changed while really it had remained the same. Though he recognized a right to nationality and a right to freedom from oppression, Liebknecht argued that the word "nationality" had been used to deceive people. Since each modern state contained a mixture of nationalities, consistently carrying out national self-determination would end in chaos; one should look at each independence movement separately. Liebknecht ridiculed the thesis that economic advancement justified national independence and said that some used the materialist conception of history to cloak a "Gladstonean hatred of the Turks." Liebknecht alleged that those people championing the Cretans and Armenians said nothing about Poland, even though the oppression there was much worse. Russia fomented protest over the Ottoman Empire but not over Poland.

There in Poland is the touchstone for enthusiasm over nationality. Whoever is enthusiastic about the Armenians and Cretans but has no sympathy, no pity, for the Poles and no

<sup>4</sup>Kautsky, "Die orientalische Frage und die Sozialdemokratie," *Vorwärts*, March 4, 1897, pp. 1f. On March 9 Kautsky wrote Bernstein that in the article against Liebknecht on the Eastern Question he had tried to show that on Marxist grounds one could both favor Turkey in 1877/78 and presently be opposed. Liebknecht could no longer use Marx against him. KK-EB March 9, 1897.

<sup>5</sup>August Bebel, "Über die Wirren im Orient," a speech reported in *Vorwärts*, March 5, 1897, p. 5.

hatred and no curse for the murderers of Poland, that person is either a thoughtless fellow or a miserable comedian and hypocrite. Or he has tasted the Russian ruble.

Liebknrecht complained that the "young ones" did not realize the power of Russian money.<sup>6</sup>

In Liebknrecht's opinion, Great Britain's actions forced Turkey to turn to Russia. He claimed that Greece could not check Russia in the Near East. The Ottoman Empire could be reformed but for Russia preventing it, Liebknrecht believed. One should not deny a future to the Turkish people simply because they had not yet had a revolution, for then Germany would lack a future too. According to Liebknrecht, social democrats had learned to wait for their freedom; the Cretans would need to do the same. "Czarism is the last pillar of capitalism. It will be finished together with this by the 'peoples-emancipating international socialism,'" he wrote. Separating France from Russia would expose the latter as weak, unable to defeat Turkey. Liebknrecht remarked that the SDF in England saw in the agitation over the Near East an attempt to distract public attention from suffering in India.<sup>7</sup>

The same day Liebknrecht's article appeared in *Vorwärts*, Bernstein wrote Kautsky about how best to respond. It offended him that Liebknrecht would question their motives. "Then the reference to Poland! As if any of us were against an independent Poland. But where is the national movement in Poland today?" Bernstein explained that Liebknrecht's position in the party made it difficult to criticize him and that it was difficult to attack his arguments since he took these from Marx. In Bernstein's opinion, Marx had erred on the Eastern Question because he had looked at it from only one viewpoint, one colored by the 1848 Revolution, and had not presented the facts in a scientific manner. Bernstein reasoned that he could not include these ideas in an article against Liebknrecht but that he could underscore the radically changed situation in respect to the East. Bernstein denied that being a disciple of Marx meant following in his footsteps.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Wilhelm Liebknrecht, "Kreta und die Sozialdemokratie," *Vorwärts*, March 10, 1897, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1f.

<sup>8</sup>EB-KK March 10, 1897. On being a disciple of Marx, compare earlier, 296. On p. 33 Thomas Meyer, *Bernsteins konstruktiver*

On March 13 Kautsky advised Bernstein against disputing Marx along with Liebknrecht. Significantly, Kautsky agreed with Bernstein that Marx had made mistakes on the Eastern Question. However, Kautsky contended that Marx always sought to base his arguments on the facts, in contrast to Liebknrecht who argued dogmatically in defiance of reality, and that one could answer Liebknrecht from Marx's position. Kautsky then explained what he would like to reply. Bernstein embodied these ideas in the rejoinder to Liebknrecht which he prepared for *Neue Zeit*. From his letter to Kautsky on March 18, it appears that Bernstein concurred on the basic point, too: Despite the superficial agreement between Marx and Liebknrecht on the Eastern Question, there was a profound difference in their methodologies. Where the first used facts, Bernstein observed, the second employed phrases. Bernstein said that he had left Marx out of his answer to Liebknrecht.<sup>9</sup>

In the article "Crete and the Russian Peril" (dated March 15, 1897), Bernstein first expressed appreciation that *Vorwärts* had finally addressed the question of how to respond to the crisis on Crete: On March 4 it had published Kautsky's opinion that social democrats need not fear that they were helping Russia by supporting the Greeks and Cretans; on March 10 it presented Liebknrecht's view that one should be content with an autonomous Crete "until the victory of the 'peoples-emancipating international socialism' ended all oppression."<sup>10</sup> Here Bernstein again pointed to what he considered the erroneous desire to delay important political reforms until after some imminent Kladderadatsch.

Bernstein wished to correct certain arguments Liebknrecht had employed. First, Bernstein noted Liebknrecht's *ad hominem* attack on social democrats disagreeing with his interpretation of the Eastern

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*Sozialismus. Eduard Bernsteins Beitrag zur Theorie des Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1977), also cites the March 10 letter.

<sup>9</sup>KK-EB March 13, 1897; EB-KK March 18, 1897. That Kautsky agreed with Bernstein that the views of Marx on the Eastern Question were mistaken, not merely outdated, confirmed the position Bernstein had been developing since his Fabian speech. Kautsky's approving this criticism should warn us against interpreting it as conclusive evidence that Bernstein had rejected Marxism entirely.

<sup>10</sup>Bernstein, "Kreta und die russische Gefahr," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 10.



Question; he unjustly dismissed these opponents as sentimental or stupid. Liebknecht also wrongly attacked supporters of Armenia or Crete for not enthusiastically advocating Polish independence too. Bernstein asked, "What would Liebknecht say of a person who refused to participate in a wage battle of Berlin masons because the Silesian weavers have far meaner wages?" Bernstein also disagreed with Liebknecht's assessment of the situation in the Near East. To Bernstein, the collective opinion of the consuls of the six Powers, with divided interests in the Eastern Question, constituted better evidence on conditions there than statements from a government which Liebknecht himself admitted was weak and decayed. Bernstein believed that Liebknecht had falsely accused Gladstone of opposing the Ottoman government because of religion. It was the politics of the Ottoman Empire that the British leader protested.<sup>11</sup>

Bernstein then asked rhetorically what caused Liebknecht to be so "narrow minded." Bernstein's answer:

It is the Russian peril, taken in a double sense of the word. First the real Russian peril, the threat which the Czarist regime poses for Germany's and respectively Europe's internal development and which allows Liebknecht to perceive in this empire an enemy compared to whom all other enemies fade into nothingness. On this point I thoroughly agree with him, . . . But besides the real Russian peril there is a second Russian peril, which also actually exists, surely, but which rests on fiction rather than reality. It is the peril of seeing Russia where it is not and accordingly of attacking it where one hits it least.

For example, Liebknecht favored Cretan autonomy. Yet, Bernstein suggested, probably no Power more opposed Greece's annexing Crete than did Russia; and Cretan autonomy would provide endless unrest, which served the Czar's interests. According to Bernstein, Liebknecht conceded that the Ottoman Empire could no longer challenge Russia's movement into the Near East; if any Balkan country could do so, it was a strengthened Greece. Bernstein asserted that Great Britain had not acted more decisively on behalf of Crete for fear of war against Russia, possibly allied with France and Germany. Bernstein wrote,

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 10-13.

English democracy, except for a fraction of the social-democratic party, has remained faithful to its traditional platform in so far as at the very moment when Russia obstructs the liberation of the people of the East it has taken a stand against Russia as decisively as it earlier supported Russia in the Balkans. It does not always proceed in a very tactful way, but it does stand on the right side. Even if a large section of democrats in England take their ethics from the New Testament instead of some atheistic tract, these "pious hypocrites" or "bigots" or whatever else one wants to call them have done infinitely greater service to freedom in Europe than we enlightened Germans have done for the foreseeable future.<sup>12</sup>

Next Bernstein asked why Liebknecht so contradicted himself on the Eastern Question. Whom did his proposals really benefit? Bernstein answered,

. . . a phantom, a tradition turned meaningless. It may remain uncontested whether David Urquhart, of whom Marx himself once wrote that his method of comprehension is capable of condemning things but not of judging them, would still hold to his policy today; for social democracy it is all the more untenable in that Urquhart's presuppositions no longer apply in any way. In the East as in Europe itself, infinitely much has changed so that even if Urquhart had been right in all things we could not make a more aggravating mistake today than to continue his policies unexamined. And how many of Urquhart's fears have events disproved!

For Bernstein, as Russia lost interest in breaking up the Ottoman Empire, so too did European democracy in maintaining it.<sup>13</sup> By differentiating between Marx and Urquhart, Bernstein followed Kautsky's advice not to reprove Marx directly.

Bernstein replied against the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* which maintained that only a power like Austria could resist Russia in the Near East. He thought that the Balkan states could provide resistance,

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

if need be through alliances. Then Bernstein concluded that European democrats need no longer violate their natural inclination to endorse freedom movements. Russia no longer posed as a liberator; this fact would promote the struggle for freedom among Russian subjects. Bernstein conceded that breaking the Franco-Russian alliance would be of great importance. But here again Liebknecht's policy appeared self-contradictory, in Bernstein's opinion, for the strongest factor working against the alliance was French public support for Greece.<sup>14</sup>

Before his article could be published, Bernstein learned that the SPD Reichstag delegation had settled in favor of self-determination for Crete. Bernstein included an addendum dated March 21, 1897, in which he endorsed the decision while regretting that it had not been made earlier and advanced more forcefully, so that it might have better swayed public opinion. Because of Germany and Austria, Bernstein judged, the peoples of the Near East had been shown how dependent they were upon Russia. He found it foolish for German chauvinists to celebrate England's diplomatic defeat: Increased Russian strength meant more dependence for Germany on Russia; and as an industrial nation dependent on exports, Germany should favor England with its free trade. Now Great Britain, France, and Germany were divided; neither Austria nor Turkey could check the Czar. Bernstein continued,

The entire old "protective wall" theory is obsolete; the replacement for it today rests in the development of the upwardly struggling Balkan peoples into free, independent nationalities and in the development of political life in Russia itself.

In failing to speak up for the Cretans' right to self determination, Bernstein deemed the SPD worse than the English socialists who opposed Greece in that the SPD possessed greater size and influence and that in England there had been Liberals to support the Cretans.<sup>15</sup>

Still before Bernstein's article appeared, Hyndman published an article in *Vorwärts*, at the invitation of Liebknecht. For Hyndman, Russia constituted the stronghold of European Reaction. According to

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-19. KK-EB March 19, 1897; here Kautsky said that Bernstein's article on Crete was "excellent." See also EB-KK March 24, 1897.

him, the English people were not so enthusiastic for Greece; they hated Russian despotism; and they knew that Ottoman persecution of Christians was less compared to Czarist oppression. The Ottoman Empire provided a strong bulwark against Russia. To aid Russia and oppose Turkey was "sheer madness."<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, Kautsky attached a note to Bernstein's article to refute the insinuation that they were insane:

It is sheer madness, therefore, to doubt that the reform of Turkey will be easy. It must surely be an oppressive feeling for Hyndman to stand there as the only sane person in a huge madhouse; we at least know no one other than Hyndman who is free of the sheer madness of taking reform in Turkey to be a rather difficult affair; in fact, not a few people who to us poor fools appear very sensible even despair over the entire possibility of reforming Turkey.

Kautsky agreed that for a democrat to aid the Czar might be "sheer madness" but denied that opposing the Sultan meant siding with Russia. Kautsky asked whether the French democrats critical of the Ottoman regime were not precisely those battling to end the Franco-Russian alliance. Kautsky found Hyndman 20 years out-of-date to think that Turkey could be a bulwark. Now one needed to consider whether the Balkan states could form a stronger defense. Instead of disparaging the Greeks for being bankrupt and instead of accusing them of carrying out a Jameson-like raid on Crete, which he claimed Hyndman had done, Kautsky compared the Greek annexation to Garibaldi's taking Sicily for Sardinia, celebrated by European democrats.<sup>17</sup>

While the polemical battle between Hyndman and Liebknecht on the one side and Bernstein and Kautsky on the other intensified through March, the crisis in the Mediterranean escalated. By mid-April Greece and the Ottoman Empire were engaged in military conflict, which soon became a declared war. But with the Powers not

<sup>16</sup>H. M. Hyndman, "Die Orientfrage, das Europäische Konzert und Rußland," *Vorwärts*, March 25, 1897, p. 1. *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 19. See also Hyndman's essay in *Justice*, February 27, 1897, p. 4. He mentioned Liebknecht's invitation in *Justice*, June 5, 1897, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup>*Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 19f.

supporting Greece, there was little question of the outcome. Freed to concentrate its forces, the Ottoman Empire crushed martial opposition in May. The developing conflict in turn inflamed the debate between Hyndman and Bernstein.<sup>18</sup>

As early as April 15 Hyndman had written a lengthy reply to Bernstein's second *Neue Zeit* article and Kautsky's note on Crete and the Russian danger. Hyndman composed his retort before the Greco-Turkish War, but it appeared in *Vorwärts* only on May 5, 1897. The article repeated arguments which Hyndman and Liebknecht had long used to defend the Ottoman Empire, including helping the Turks reform their government. Then Hyndman attacked Kautsky and Bernstein:

Thus this West European crusade against Islam, which I see the "Neue Zeit" condones, has had the result that in order to prevent reforms the Sultan was deprived of that power which earlier preserved the integrity of Turkey. In my opinion it was sheer madness to adopt such a policy, and it is downright idiocy to continue to follow it.

Hyndman compared the Greek involvement on Crete to Jameson and the Transvaal. Against Kautsky's comparison between Garibaldi's taking Sicily and Greece's annexation of Crete, Hyndman answered that "on Sicily there was no Mohammedan population to be massacred by Christian cutthroats" and that Italian unification had been disappointing. Hyndman restated his preference for an autonomous Crete under Ottoman sovereignty. Then he turned to what for him constituted the most important aspect of the entire Eastern Question--the Russian threat.

No, I can look at the question whichever way I want, as an Englishman and a social democrat I can only agree fully with the standpoint taken by (the editor of) [sic] *Vorwärts* on the Eastern Question. The most dangerous enemy which human progress and democracy have in the world is Russia. Turkey

<sup>18</sup>See *Vorwärts*, March 6, 1897, p. 2; March 9, p. 2; March 21, p. 1; March 23, p. 2; March 30, p. 2; April 13, 1897, p. 1; April 14, p. 1; April 21, p. 1; April 22, p. 1; May 1, 1897, p. 1; May 11, p. 1; May 12, p. 1; May 13, p. 1; May 19, p. 1. See also *Justice*, April 24, 1897, p. 4; and May 1, 1897, p. 4.

cannot place obstacles in the way of Europe's natural development. Russia can and wants to. Russia is doing it already. Any policy aiming to throw Turkey into the arms of Russia, which has the determining voice in the Council of Europe, is therefore a ruinous policy for the well-being of the European peoples, including the Russians themselves.<sup>19</sup>

To his article agreeing with Liebknecht on the Eastern Question, Hyndman appended a complaint specifically about Bernstein: "... we English social democrats can do nothing right in the eyes of our liberal-Fabian friend Bernstein who, I believe, is one of the editors of *Neue Zeit*." Hyndman protested Bernstein's alleged criticism of SDF views on events in South Africa and India. He continued,

Now we have refused to join in the hypocritical, pseudo-democratic clamor about Greece and Crete and "Holy Russia" which was started by the "Daily Chronicle" and its hysterical priests of male and female gender and is urged on with full lung power. But our friend Bernstein holds this against us. Here we are even more on the wrong track, and I especially should now wander about the country and excite the people that they support war for Greece.<sup>20</sup>

Hyndman objected to Bernstein's allegedly misrepresenting the SDF, but then he expressed his hope for a better understanding. And to blunt this explicit criticism of the man who was still the London correspondent of *Vorwärts*, Liebknecht himself added,

Given the loyalty of our English comrades and the scrupulous sense of justice of our friend Bernstein, we are of the firm conviction that the mutual misunderstandings, which we also regret, will gradually decrease and make room for harmonious cooperation. After all, harmony is not monotony, and it does not exclude differences in thinking and feeling.

<sup>19</sup>H. M. Hyndman, "Die Orientfrage und das Makedonien Europas," *Vorwärts*, May 5, 1897, pp. 1f.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.



However, nearly a decade of conflict between the leaders of the SDF and the editors of *Neue Zeit* could not be stilled so easily. In a letter on May 7 Kautsky asked Bernstein's opinion of Hyndman, while expressing his own disregard.<sup>21</sup>

Bernstein wrote back that he had already submitted a formal response. In a reply (dated April 27, 1897) to an earlier challenge from *Vorwärts*, he provided evidence that some English Liberals opposed Russia while supporting Greece. Bernstein allowed that the position might be wrong, but for him the Liberals' views were

put forward by their advocates with a force of language which—I cannot help myself—contrasts in a positive way with the stuck-up fashion in which one section of the socialist press treats affairs in the East. The appeal to the love of freedom of the English people and to their hatred of Russian despotism may warrant reconsideration at this moment, but to label it "jingoism" and "bloodthirstiness," the way "Justice" did for example, does not exactly seem to me to be the task of a social-democratic paper.

Attached to this statement was Bernstein's reply to Hyndman's May 5 attack. Bernstein professed that he had spoken only once about the SDF's stand on India. He claimed to present the English socialist movement objectively. He denied writing that Hyndman should agitate for war on behalf of Greece. Bernstein described how Hyndman's stand on Russia and the Near East was often problematic. Finally, Bernstein made a crucially important statement treating his understanding of liberalism, Fabianism, and their relationship to German social democracy.

It pleases Hyndman, following the example of Bax, to characterize me as "liberal-Fabian." In so far as it may be justified about me, it must be a criticism of my attempt to retain or to acquire a certain breadth of vision, one which is free from dogmatic narrow-mindedness, when I look at things. In this sense I am indeed "liberal"—if need be even nonconformist, which is probably the worst. So far as Fabianism is concerned, I see in it the natural counterpoise to Hyndmanism, if the word be allowed. It was the necessary

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2. KK-EB, May 7, 1897.

reaction against the tendency, which was rather strong back then, to turn Marx's teachings into a sectarian dogma. It certainly participates in expanding the socialist movement in England, just as it has contributed much to placing that movement on a realistic foundation. In German social democracy both elements—social-political realism and theory—are represented, and accordingly the attribute "Fabian" in itself can hurt me as little as the title "member of the Social Democratic Federation."<sup>22</sup>

The statement marked a new stage in Bernstein's evolving assessment of liberalism and Fabianism; it also revealed the particular way in which Bernstein perceived these two movements, the specific reasons he approved of them. Bernstein liked liberalism and Fabianism precisely to the extent that they opposed dogmatic sectarianism. On the one hand, liberalism need not signify commitment to bourgeois society, to capitalism, to the prevention of proletarian rule and socialism. Rather, to Bernstein, here liberalism meant open-mindedness, the objective and non-prejudiced attitude towards reality which for him characterized the thinking of Marx, Engels, and Kautsky at their best. On the other hand, Bernstein found Fabianism to be a natural reaction to Hyndman; he thought that the Fabians stood closer to Marxism in that they sought to base political actions on actual conditions. In affirming liberalism and Fabianism in this particular way, Bernstein affirmed central characteristics of the mature interpretation of Marx. At the same time, however, Bernstein was coming to doubt that this interpretation represented the SPD. He separated the party's "social-political realism" from its "theory," implicitly associating the former with Fabianism and the latter with the SDF. Had Bernstein not begun to accept the allegation by Russell and Shaw that the SPD's practice contradicted its theory?<sup>23</sup>

In his *Neue Zeit* article "The Victory of the Turks and Social Democracy" (dated May 11, 1897), Bernstein denounced the position taken by Hyndman on the Near-East crisis. Bernstein saw the Ottoman victory over Greece as a victory of militarism and of a "stationary if not reactionary power" over a progressive nation. He charged that the

<sup>22</sup>Bernstein, "Rußland und die englischen Radikalen," *Vorwärts*, May 9, 1897, pp. 1f. EB-KK May 9, 1897.

<sup>23</sup>Earlier, 294f. and 267f.

European Powers had restrained Greece while freeing the Ottoman Empire to concentrate on the one challenger. He asked if everyone had forgotten the recent violence in the Near East. To him, Hyndman's denigrating the Greeks and praising the honesty of the Sultan's government really said more about Hyndman's way of thinking. Bernstein maintained that he and Kautsky had been consistent on the Eastern Question—valuing self-determination for Crete, and support for this from European democrats, but not at the price of a general European war. That it would have come to such a war was an assumption never proven, in Bernstein's opinion.<sup>24</sup>

Then Bernstein's sincere grief over the situation in the Near East caused his long-smoldering anger with the SDF to explode. He agreed that international social democracy should have served as a guardian of peace and rights. But it had failed to do so. Bernstein wrote,

I openly confess that when I read the reports of European consuls about the Armenian massacres . . . and remembered with what heartless unconcern social-democratic papers passed over them merely to avoid having to say something negative about the Pasha regime in Stamboul, there really did stir inside me something like "sheer madness." One who does not lose his mind over certain things is—well, that one is indeed to be called fortunate.

At any rate I did not regret at the time that the Social Democratic Federation did not yet dominate the public arena in England; that the nonconformists which Mr. Hyndman showers with all possible invective still have some ground among the English people; that the much derided nonconformist conscience is still a reality. It is truly so terribly cheap to rail at "Christian hypocrisy," "Christian insincerity," "Christian Pharisaism," and the like; and I do not deny that it all exists. But hypocrisy, insincerity, and Pharisaism are not attached to the confession; they are found in all confessions and parties; and lastly even social democracy is not above the parable of the mote and the beam. In the Armenian question the nonconformists have done what social democracy should have done; and of the

<sup>24</sup>Bernstein, "Der Sieg der Türken und die Sozialdemokratie," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 260-263.

person who takes up the cause of the downtrodden I will not ask in which catechism the person was drilled.

If social democrats everywhere had spoken up on behalf of the Greeks, Bernstein believed, then perhaps the war could have been avoided. The social-democratic voice in England and Germany would have been especially valuable.<sup>25</sup> In this vehement manner Bernstein blamed what he took to be the mistaken opinions of Hyndman for turning social democrats from their duty in the Eastern Question and inducing them to serve the interests of Russia. Such were the results of the distorted, utopian, and dogmatic use of Marx.

Bernstein felt it important to refute several specific arguments employed by Hyndman. Bernstein agreed that Russia was a threat but added that the Czar's government was realistic. It could grant concessions to the Poles; it would seek to win influence over Greece. In stressing economic motives, Hyndman had overlooked national feeling, in Bernstein's opinion. Bernstein also wished to counter Hyndman's argument that because of the Mohammedan minority living on Crete, Greece's taking the island could not be compared with Garibaldi's landing on Sicily. To Bernstein such reasoning meant that the government of a country should be determined not by language, ethnic identity, geography, or the desire of the vast majority of the inhabitants but by the presence of a foreign minority. "To what peculiarities will the Turkey cult yet carry us?" Bernstein wondered. It was as if one said that since the unification of Italy had not ended exploitation but rather led to industrialization, it might equally well not have occurred. Bernstein exclaimed, "And this is offered to us from people who call themselves disciples of Marx!" In a footnote Kautsky reinforced his friend by criticizing Bax, who had recently stated that nationalism was outdated and could be dismissed by social democrats and that German national unity hindered the socialist movement. Kautsky claimed that German socialists knew that unification had helped their movement.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Bernstein, "Der Sieg der Türken," pp. 263-265. On the "nonconformist conscience," compare above, 167f.

<sup>26</sup>Bernstein, "Der Sieg der Türken," pp. 265-267. See earlier, 230f. William George Vettes, "The German Social Democrats and the Eastern Question, 1848-1900," *The American Slavic and East European Review*, XVII (February 1958), pp. 96f., also describes the controversy.

Finally Bernstein asked what good came from repeating all this now that the damage was done. His implicit answer: to expose the appalling failure of social democracy, misled by the confused thinking of Hyndman. Bernstein concluded,

May they celebrate the Turkish victories, those who believed that they served the workers' cause by preventing the forceful action of social democrats on behalf of the Greeks. To me these victories appear not only an actual but also a moral defeat for democracy.<sup>27</sup>

Bernstein's article enraged Hyndman and other leaders of the SDF. Eleanor Marx wrote Liebknecht on June 2, 1897, that Hyndman was

in a great state of mind about Bernstein's latest article. Of course Hyndman forgets the way in which he attacked all of us—the General, you, and all. But it is an unfortunate business, and each side is becoming more and more embittered. And Bax, who is not unnaturally sore at the splendid thrashing he has got from Kautsky, is doing his utmost to envenom things.

On June 5 *Justice* denounced Kautsky and Bernstein. In the same number, Hyndman declared,

To carry the discussion further with Mr. Bernstein would, therefore, be to lower myself. I never think the worse of anybody because he is unable to express his honest opinions clearly and vigorously. That is his misfortune. But when a man like Mr. Bernstein tries to eke out his own incapacity by deliberate untruth and studied impertinence, I at once withdraw from the debate, and leave the public to judge between us without comment from me.

I sincerely regret, however, that the great German Social-Democratic Party, which all English Social-Democrats admire and respect, should be officially represented in this country

<sup>27</sup>Bernstein, "Der Sieg der Türken," pp. 267f.

by a person whose methods of controversy give us an exact measure of his intelligence and character.<sup>28</sup>

The crisis over Greece, Crete, and the Ottoman Empire in the spring of 1897 encouraged changes already occurring in Bernstein's thinking. More and more (though not exclusively) he came to associate "Marxism" or "the theory of the SPD" with the ideas of Hyndman and Liebknecht rather than with those of Kautsky. Bernstein did so even while believing that the first two distorted Marxism. On the Eastern Question, they emphasized Marx's opposition to Russia while ignoring his dislike for the Ottoman Empire. Yet, what else could Bernstein do? He was caught up in an intense polemical battle, and he employed political terminology the way he thought it commonly understood.

When the German reformer Heinrich Herkner contrasted Bernstein with Kautsky, Bernstein wrote his friend on May 17 to comment on his changing attitude toward Marxism and on the reasons for the change. He explained that Herkner could have used Kautsky against Kautsky or even Marx against Marx. What was important, to Bernstein, was his own more pessimistic attitude toward the Marxist movement.

I have undoubtedly become more conservative than you, and with this conservatism a more conciliatory spirit has entered for me, too. Two circumstances have contributed to this effect. First, I am removed from the . . . action; and second, a movement like that over here can make one reactionary. What one sees here, where no . . . legislation furnishes people's heads with a nimbus, is frightful. Shallowness, lack of conscience, vanity--these are . . . characteristics of the intellectual leaders of the true social democracy in England. And against this roguery I, too, am a reactionary mass.

Bernstein complained that he found it impossibly difficult to work with Bax, Hyndman, and Aveling. Yet, these three represented Marxism in

<sup>28</sup>Eleanor Marx to Liebknecht (in English), June 2, 1897, in Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel mit Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels*, Georg Eckert, ed. (The Hague, 1963), p. 454; *Justice*, June 5, 1897, pp. 3f.



England.<sup>29</sup> It was under such extreme and emotional conditions in Great Britain, where generally one identified Marxism with the politics of the SDF and the speeches of Liebknecht, that Bernstein came to believe his defense of the mature theory required an attack on what was commonly called "Marxism," including certain early ideas of Marx himself.

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<sup>29</sup>EB-KK May 17, 1897.

## B. Prussia

Back in 1893 Bernstein's proposal that social democrats participate in elections to the Prussian provincial diet had met defeat at the Cologne party congress. Election of a social democrat probably required cooperation with a bourgeois liberal party, and many believed that such compromise would lead to de-emphasizing the class struggle or to abandoning principles. In contrast, Kautsky had agreed with Bernstein's 1893 proposal. In the autumn of 1896 when Giovanni Lerda submitted to *Neue Zeit* an article opposing compromise, Kautsky accepted it in order to have it refuted.<sup>1</sup>

On December 8, 1896, Kautsky wrote Bernstein to ask him to answer Lerda. Kautsky wanted a comparison of the political intransigence of Lerda to the policy of Vollmar, for Kautsky feared that both approaches endangered the SPD's proletarian character. In Kautsky's opinion, the party was too big to remain a mere protest group; it needed to change tactics. Vollmar would include non-proletarian classes; but eventually the practice would end in division, Kautsky thought. For him the alternative was compromise. Kautsky admitted that it would be difficult, that it would require studying the actual political situation instead of mouthing slogans. In Germany the bourgeois democratic parties were weak and unreliable, he believed; but the SPD should support them in some circumstances; the party did so already in run-off elections for the Reichstag.<sup>2</sup>

Bernstein responded on December 12 that he would be happy to rebut Lerda since the question of political compromise touched issues he was planning to discuss in his "Problems" series. As indicated earlier, this series of articles was directed at least in part against the SDF. Non-cooperation with bourgeois parties characterized their interpretation of Marxism. As in the case of the Eastern Question, it was an issue on which they agreed with Liebknecht. Recent SDF attacks on cooperating with the Liberal Party in England may also have prompted Bernstein to accept the Lerda assignment. For both him and

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<sup>1</sup>KK-EB December 8, 1896. Above, 43 and 51f.

<sup>2</sup>KK-EB December 8, 1896; quoted by Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Zur Ideologie der Partei vor dem 1. Weltkrieg* (Hanover, 1967), p. 79. Lerda's article appeared in *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 420-431.

Kautsky the authentic Marxist position, stated in the *Communist Manifesto*, was for the workers to back the progressive bourgeois.<sup>3</sup>

At the very beginning of his article against Lerda, Bernstein sought to expose a contradiction. On the one hand, Lerda employed an analogy from nature: To alter events a power must have unity; therefore, a political party must oppose any compromise. Bernstein rejected the argument in itself for several reasons. First, he found analogies between nature and society imprecise. Second, compromise need not mean disunity. Third, the argument proved the opposite of Lerda's thesis, in Bernstein's opinion. On the other hand, and here lay the contradiction, Lerda also noted a fundamental difference between nature and society. Not unlike Bax, whose debate with Kautsky continued at the time Lerda submitted his article, Lerda complained about those who understood historical materialism in an extreme form. Lerda insisted that human consciousness had its own laws, that moral and intellectual forces also influenced society. Otherwise, he suggested, a social change different from the one desired by social democrats might occur. Bernstein agreed with this concern. The task of social democracy, he argued, was to replace the "blind

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<sup>3</sup>EB-KK December 12, 1896. *Justice*, November 21, 1896, p. 4; and April 14, 1897, p. 1. The relevant passage from the *Communist Manifesto* is found on p. 352 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York, 1972): "In Germany they [the Communists] fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty bourgeoisie."

Discussion of the compromise issue is found in G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought* (London, 1953-56), III, p. 252; Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854-1938. Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh, 1978), p. 253; Gerhard A. Ritter, *Die Arbeiterbewegung im Wilhelminischen Reich. Die Sozialdemokratische Partei und die Freien Gewerkschaften 1890-1900* (Berlin, 1959), pp. 80f. and 177-181; Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 72-74; and Wolfgang Abendroth, *Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Frankfurt/M., 1964), p. 36.

working of pure mechanical forces" with conscious planned action in order to save time and energy in achieving socialism.<sup>4</sup>

Bernstein then offered examples of how political intransigence supposedly produced disaster while cooperation with other parties and classes furthered the proletarian cause: Did the Chartist movement in England collapse because of compromise? On the contrary. Bernstein reported that the Chartists fought the liberals first of all. In contrast to the Chartists, some laborers joined with progressive bourgeois in a coalition which contributed to suffrage reform. One organization of both proletarians and bourgeois was the Reform League, participation in which Marx endorsed. According to Bernstein, worker influence on Parliament led to the education act of 1870, better laws on factories and the right to organize, a more advanced Parliament in 1880, and finally the suffrage reform of 1884. Bernstein recalled a "radical socialist" attack on the Progressives in the 1895 elections to the London County Council. The "intransigents" had not cooperated with the Progressives; indeed, they had attacked the Progressive Party. Bernstein said that the tactic merely secured the election of conservatives in place of Progressives. Clearly, Bernstein still resented the SDF's joy at the Liberal defeat of 1895. He also maintained that there were numerous examples of German social democrats cooperating with bourgeois liberals to win electoral victories.<sup>5</sup>

Bernstein surmised that the widespread social-democratic opposition to compromise derived from several mistakes. For one, people confused compromise on principles with compromise in action. Bernstein replied that the more a political party was sure of its beliefs, the more it could enter alliances without fear. He suspected that intransigence often rested on something other than clarity of conviction—on slogans, false analysis, laziness in thinking. Bernstein denied that the rejection of compromise helped preserve the class character of the movement. Here he embodied ideas from Kautsky's letter:

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<sup>4</sup>Bernstein, "Klassenkampf und Kompromiß. Eine Antwort auf Giovanni Lerdas Artikel über die Taktik der sozialdemokratischen Partei," *Neue Zeit*, XVa (1896-97), 516-518.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 518-521. On Marx and the Reform League, compare above, 304. On the 1895 Parliament elections, see above, 139f.

Any movement which has progressed beyond the sectarian stage to the formation of a party needs success. It must become stronger and advance, for only growth is life, and stagnation is death. However, there are limits to the expansion of the proletarian party set by the strength and degree of development of the proletariat. Where the party has won that part of the proletariat open to it, it would accordingly be condemned to quiet waiting, for in all countries this part constitutes in most districts the minority of the population. Freedom to cooperate with other parties offers the SPD the opportunity to be active nevertheless. If cooperation is impossible, the proletarian party is forced to look for growth from other classes of the population in order to expand its sphere of influence in this way. Winning such elements no longer remains "part-time work," to express ourselves figuratively, rather becomes the primary job; agitation becomes more and more adapted to this need. From a party of class-conscious proletarians, it thus changes rapidly into a party of all possible sorts of dissatisfied people, a party which perhaps still retains the proletarian phrases but has already abandoned the thing itself or at least has stirred it into the happiness-for-everyone mush. Locally it may continue to play a fully respectable role for a while, but in effect as a bourgeois-radical party with a socialist placard, always ready to experience a fatal crash the very moment it either discovers its proletarian heart or denies it for the sake of good friends. Cooperation, political compromise does not necessitate denial or weakening of one's own class demands. One commits oneself for a specific purpose, without any obligation continuing beyond it.<sup>6</sup>

At the time of this article, Bernstein still found it wrong to turn the SPD into a people's party representing not laborers but rather all Germans upset with the existing system. The SPD should not become a bourgeois-radical party without a socialist goal.

Bernstein admitted that the SPD might often have to cooperate with the party it fought the hardest in elections but judged that socialists had benefitted from doing so. He acknowledged that sometimes the party entering a compromise with the social democrats

<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, "Klassenkampf und Kompromiß," pp. 521-523.

might betray them but estimated that such behavior would hurt that party more. Bernstein concluded by mentioning the upcoming Prussian diet elections:

Today the provincial diets are the ramparts of the reactionary parties from where those blows against the workers' movement are dealt for which the Reichstag is not available. Should we do nothing to occupy these ramparts?

He challenged the SPD to decide how it would use the next elections in regard to winning an equal suffrage.<sup>7</sup>

The SPD's interest in the Prussian diet and in political compromise with bourgeois liberal parties increased in May 1897 with the introduction of a bill for a new law on organizations and assemblies (Vereins- und Versammlungsrecht) allowing the police to dissolve organizations or assemblies if these appeared to endanger public security or the peace. The proposed legislation would also have circumscribed the participation of women and minors in the labor movement. The lower chamber of the Prussian diet removed the extension of police control over organizations but left in the exclusion of minors. Then the upper chamber strengthened the bill against the social democrats, threatening their organizations and meetings. Since the German constitution promised Reich legislation on organizations and assemblies, the Prussian bill could be seen as an attempt by the government to circumvent the relative democracy of the Reichstag and retreat to the Prussian diet under Junker domination, elected with the three-class suffrage.<sup>8</sup>

The SPD called for petitions, protest meetings, and demonstrations. In the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* an article proposed that the SPD participate in the next diet elections with the goal of ending

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 523f. In KK-EB January 16, 1897, Kautsky praised Bernstein's answer to Lerda as "excellent."

<sup>8</sup>*Vorwärts*, May 14, 1897, p. 1; May 19, p. 1; May 29, p. 1; May 30, pp. 1f.; June 1, 1897, p. 1; June 23, pp. 1f.; June 25, p. 1; June 26, p. 1; July 1, 1897, p. 1; July 22, p. 1; July 23, p. 2.

The lower chamber of the Prussian diet eventually rejected the bill as altered by the upper chamber; *Vorwärts*, July 25, 1897, p. 1. Wadim Tschubinski, *Wilhelm Liebknecht. Eine Biographie*, Bernhard Jahnel, tr. (Berlin, 1973), pp. 310f.



Junker domination, no matter which party then took control. The *Berliner Zeitung* seconded the proposal and suggested that Liberals (Freisinnige) endorse SPD candidates in some election districts in exchange for socialist help in others.<sup>9</sup>

However, in the midst of great concern about the new legislation and of rising enthusiasm for entering an election block with the Liberals, *Vorwärts* hesitated. It cautioned that changing the Cologne decision would require thorough discussion, for which the needed calm was absent. It acknowledged that the *Communist Manifesto* called for backing progressive bourgeois when they fought for democratic reforms, but it did not see the German bourgeois liberals doing so.<sup>10</sup>

At this crucial moment, Kautsky published his own *Neue Zeit* article in which he resurrected Bernstein's 1893 proposal and declared himself decidedly in favor of participating in the Prussian elections and if need be in an election block with the Liberal Party. Kautsky recalled one of the arguments against Bernstein's earlier proposition—that it would re-invigorate the Prussian diet. If ignored, the three-class franchise system would supposedly collapse. To Kautsky, the bill on organizations and assemblies proved the supposition false: Though incapable of advancing Prussia, the diet could aid the reactionaries; it could help the government avoid democracy in the Reichstag. As had Bernstein, Kautsky reminded his readers that the Cologne congress had authorized a campaign for equal suffrage in Prussia. But nothing had been done. He explained,

When we declare the provincial diet a meaningless cadaver to be ignored at best, when we declare it superfluous even to attempt to take part in its elections, or even when one, like the Saxon minority, credits the presence of our representatives in the diet with such little significance that one light-heartedly asks them to vacate without much ado the position we had conquered, then we ourselves dull the

<sup>9</sup>*Vorwärts*, May 20, 1897, p. 1; May 21, p. 2. On the varieties of German liberalism see earlier, 51 note 12. The strong social-democratic response is described in "Übersicht über die allgemeine Lage der sozialdemokratischen und anarchistischen Bewegung," January 1898, Bl. 61-63; in ZSAP, Reichsamt des Innern, Nr. 13688, Bl. 60-78.

<sup>10</sup>*Vorwärts*, May 21, 1897, p. 2; May 26, pp. 2f.; May 27, p. 1.

agitation for universal suffrage and condemn to ineffectiveness the decision to fight for it.

Participating in the Prussian diet elections would allow the SPD to bring its campaign for a just franchise to the broad masses, Kautsky observed. The struggle for equal suffrage would become one over concrete issues like organizations and assemblies, the arbitrariness of bureaucrats and Junkers, the public schools, the rights of employees in state-owned enterprises. Kautsky described the value for the cause of equal suffrage of having even one social democrat in the diet.<sup>11</sup>

Kautsky next addressed several specific reasons given for not participating. Yes, that the ballot was not secret might bring problems for some socialist voters; many laborers would decide they could not run the risk. However, Kautsky added, in large cities the danger would decrease; and in Austria the open voting had not discouraged too many. Yes, Kautsky conceded that the three-class franchise prevented the SPD from directly electing a representative on its own. But he cited Bernstein that the party could decide the election in perhaps 100 districts or more. It regularly performed such a role in run-off elections to the Reichstag. In Kautsky's opinion, Bernstein's proposal merely adapted the tactic of the run-off elections to the Prussian suffrage.<sup>12</sup>

As for the supposition that cooperation with the Liberal Party constituted a corrupting "compromise," Kautsky repeated once again that social democrats often cooperated in the Reichstag run-off elections. In Kautsky's opinion, concern about corruption—that is, about playing down social-democratic differences from the Liberals for fear of losing their eventual support—was even less justified in the indirect Prussian diet elections; for there the workers would vote for SPD candidates to become electors, not for Liberal candidates.<sup>13</sup>

Kautsky restated Bernstein's distinction between compromise on principle and compromise in action. Like Bernstein, Kautsky admitted that the Liberal electors might refuse to vote for social-democratic

<sup>11</sup>Kautsky, "Umsturzgesetz und Landtagswahlen in Preußen," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 275-277. A summary of Kautsky's article appeared in *Vorwärts*, May 27, 1897, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup>Kautsky, "Umsturzgesetz und Landtagswahlen," pp. 277f.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 278f.

candidates, but he believed that such non-cooperation was less likely under the conditions of the Prussian elections than under those of the run-off elections for the Reichstag. Kautsky thought that even if the Liberals were to abandon the social democrats in this way, matters would be no worse than at present. While he could picture SPD electors endorsing Liberal diet representatives, per arrangement, Kautsky rejected the suggestion by some social democrats of entering the contest with the goal only of weakening the Junkers, not of electing social democrats in their own right. The strategy would negate one of the chief benefits of participating—widespread social-democratic agitation.<sup>14</sup>

From Kautsky's perspective, the SPD faced two choices, in effect. On the one hand, its refusal to participate in the diet elections meant supporting the conservatives; the party must choose between the Liberals and the Junkers. On the other hand, participating in the diet elections would constitute a vigorous response to the organization bill, an alternative to an uprising which the government could violently crush. One can see that in this sense participation fit with the policy Engels had recommended in 1895. During the suffrage crisis in Saxony, Bernstein had also warned against being driven to mass uprising when other measures existed to defend democratic rights.<sup>15</sup>

Franz Mehring immediately answered Kautsky. Mehring conceded that no party tenet forbid participating in the diet elections, but in his opinion several practical issues spoke against it: First, voters in the initial election of electors might have to spend three hours or longer at the polls, and employers were not required to grant time off to vote. Second, the Liberals could insist that social-democratic electors support them without a quid pro quo. Should the SPD electors

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 280-282. On May 26, 1897, Bernstein wrote Kautsky saying that he thoroughly agreed with Kautsky's views and stating his hope that Liebknecht would not succeed in suppressing the issue. Bernstein reported that he was prepared to answer if accused of going against principle. EB-KK May 26, 1897.

For Bernstein's warning that the SPD find some alternative to either mere protest demonstrations or else street fighting, see earlier, 180. On Engels's concern about a violent confrontation of the workers and the ruling classes, see earlier, 55. For Kautsky's concern, see earlier, 54.

walk out and throw the decision to the Junkers, then they would make futile the sacrifices of the election campaign and would themselves frustrate a major reason for entering it. Third, even if the Liberal leadership told its electors to vote for the SPD candidate in a certain district, the electors would not do so. East of the Elbe they would fear the social or commercial influence of the Junkers. Finally, Mehring argued that if mass participation in the diet elections was to be attempted, the SPD should inform its voters that the only purpose was to break the conservative stranglehold. He questioned whether this limited goal was sufficient for an effective participation.<sup>16</sup>

On May 28, 1897, Kautsky requested Bernstein's aid against Mehring's attack. Kautsky felt that Mehring had implied foreigners could not understand conditions in Prussia. Accordingly, Kautsky asked Bernstein, a native of Berlin, to join the debate. On May 31 Bernstein replied that he was prepared to do so. He thought that the circumstances for successful participation were good and that it would be a shame to lose the opportunity because of Liebknecht and Parvus. On June 6 Bernstein added that he found Mehring's essay tolerable. It was Liebknecht who kept insisting on clinging to principle.<sup>17</sup>

Bernstein's *Neue Zeit* article, "What Social Democracy in Prussia Can Accomplish in the Diet Elections," appeared in mid-June 1897. Bernstein argued that conditions had improved since 1893, that now even opponents of the SPD concurred that its participation in the elections might alter the diet's composition. He believed that if a political party had power to further the interests and principles it represented, then it had a duty to use this power. In his opinion, that the proposed legislation on organizations and assemblies had met opposition in the lower chamber of the diet resulted not from the SPD's boycotting the diet elections but rather despite the boycott. Bernstein's article revealed an evaluation of the German bourgeoisie more optimistic than the one of Mehring and Liebknecht. Bernstein maintained that many bourgeois were upset with the present regime and that their greater opposition to the government showed that the

<sup>16</sup>Franz Mehring, "Die Arbeiter und die Dreiklassenwahl," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 289-293. It was dated May 26, 1897, just the time Kautsky's article appeared. Mehring said that his essay was finished for the most part when he learned of Kautsky's position.

<sup>17</sup>KK-EB May 28, 1897; EB-KK May 31, 1897; EB-KK June 6, 1897.



"red specter" no longer scared them into subservience. Bernstein cautioned,

According to a certain viewpoint it follows that if this were so then social democracy could no longer be on the correct path. It would be nothing without instilling fear and horror. We hope we need not first reveal in detail the deceptiveness of such manner of deduction. A raging bull or a mad dog can instill panic terror without rousing a desire for compromise, and one acquiesces not in what one merely fears but rather in what one recognizes to be inevitable.<sup>18</sup>

Bernstein next confronted the major points against participation, especially those used by Mehring against Kautsky: The first election of electors could take several hours; but the difficulty had a reverse side, Bernstein observed. The complex Prussian election process presupposed a small percentage of the third-class electorate taking part; 70% of the third class showing up at the polls would present problems for the election officials. Bernstein believed that social-democratic workers would be willing to sacrifice a day's pay once they realized the importance of the diet elections. He doubted that many employers would fire people for being absent to vote and reported that the state railroads not only released employees to vote but even paid them for the time missed. Here too, Bernstein relied on his more positive opinion of the German situation in general. Against the argument that compromises were corrupting, Bernstein asked his readers to look at the social-democratic past, specifically at past actions of Liebknecht. Of course compromise might corrupt, Bernstein admitted, if it surrendered basic interests for a short-run advantage; it must be in line with major goals. Against the view that compromise might confuse voters, he referred to the run-off elections for the Reichstag. Possibly because of Mehring's alleged praise of an abstract "proletariat," Bernstein added,

Today's worker is perhaps not the epitome of political, philosophical, artistic, etc. infallibility the way one likes to depict him on other occasions; but he certainly has enough brains to distinguish among enemies and to be able to understand that to give a party his vote under certain

<sup>18</sup>Bernstein, "Was die Sozialdemokratie in Preußen bei der Landtagswahl ausrichten kann," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 385f.

conditions during an election does not mean selling himself, body and soul, to that party.<sup>19</sup>

There remained the question of what success the SPD might expect in the elections. Against Mehring, Bernstein would not rule out winning diet seats. Bernstein's greater confidence in the German bourgeois came to the fore in his conviction that the Liberals would opt for social democrats over Junkers. Bernstein enumerated electoral districts where it seemed conceivable that SPD electors might decide whether the seats would be "Conservative-National Liberal" or rather "Liberal-democratic." In some districts social-democratic participation would threaten the Liberal victory, leading the Liberals to concede seats in exchange for help elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

Bernstein concluded his article with several specific observations. For example, to campaign against the Junkers was insufficient; one needed to bolster bourgeois democrats too. He anticipated that participation would shift 80 to 100 seats from the conservative parties, mainly to the Liberals.

With that the physiognomy of the diet would be totally changed; a Conservative-National Liberal majority and even a Conservative-Ultramontane majority would be prevented. This would put a spoke in the wheel of the technique of playing the diet off against the Reichstag, and then it would depend solely on the determination of the Liberals to what extent the right to popular representation in Prussia and in the Reich would finally become a reality. No one will place great faith in this determination, but a great push would be given, and all of public life would receive a new motion.

The first independent task of the chamber so constituted would, however, have to be electoral reform.

With Kautsky, Bernstein agreed that the movement for equal suffrage would be greatly strengthened by having diet representatives committed

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 387-389. Bernstein had criticized adulation of the proletariat in his contribution to the "Three-Star Article" in 1879. See earlier, 11 and 156.

<sup>20</sup>Bernstein, "Die Sozialdemokratie bei der Landtagswahl," pp. 389-394.



to it. Bernstein maintained that social legislation by the Reich remained incomplete without democratic self-administration, a matter for the diet, and that the Reichstag suffrage remained insecure so long as the diet was a stronghold of privilege. For those who dismissed such concerns as unimportant, Bernstein returned to an idea he had developed in his 1893 article proposing participation and had repeated during the suffrage crisis in Saxony:

Thus social democracy in Prussia is facing a great task. Whoever believes in the imminent occurrence of the great collapse may not value it highly. But whoever holds a different path of social development to be possible and probable, whoever believes above all that the path to higher social arrangements need not necessarily lead over the abyss but rather becomes shorter the more it moves in an ascending direction will attribute great significance to it.<sup>21</sup>

Addressing social democrats of the sixth Berlin Reichstag district on Tuesday, June 22, Liebknecht answered both Kautsky and Bernstein. In Liebknecht's opinion, the Liberals were as conservative as the Junkers; only the SPD truly spoke up for civil freedoms. For the most part it had avoided alliances with other parties, which together formed "one reactionary mass." He denied that the political climate had changed significantly since 1893 when the Cologne congress rejected participation. Apparently against Kautsky, Liebknecht alleged that the suffrage in Austria was more favorable. To vote against certain opponents in the Reichstag elections and then to support them for the diet would be confusing, Liebknecht thought. Social democrats could not win a seat on their own; and a pact among the electors would be more dangerous than a party agreement. Liebknecht claimed that neither Bernstein, Kautsky, nor Parvus understood Prussian conditions. The SPD should leave the diet to decay. On June 29 Liebknecht stressed that for thirty years German socialists had fought the bourgeoisie and that to help them now would be stupid.<sup>22</sup> In this negative assessment of the bourgeoisie lay a basic difference between Liebknecht's view and that of Kautsky and Bernstein.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 394f. Bernstein's arguments also appeared in *Vorwärts*, July 3, 1897, p. 5. Above, 43 and 181-183.

<sup>22</sup>*Vorwärts*, June 24, 1897, p. 7; July 1, 1897, p. 7.

In his *Neue Zeit* article "Talk or Fight," which appeared in early July, Bernstein responded to the image of the German bourgeois being propagated by Liebknecht, Mehring, and also the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. Bernstein allowed that if circumstances in Germany were as bleak as some opponents claimed, then participation in the diet elections would be senseless. He described participation as

condemned from the beginning if the non-socialist parties in Germany consist entirely of villains and fools and the majority of those who vote for social democracy are pitiful cowards; but I cannot concede that this presupposition is accurate.

Bernstein calculated that the SPD could count on more than 600,000 voters in the diet elections. Mehring and other opponents of participation had asserted that the Liberals would ask social democrats to vote for their candidates but then not return the favor. But, according to Bernstein, their evidence was past Liberal behavior in Reichstag run-off elections and a statement in the *Vossische Zeitung*. He interpreted the newspaper merely to say that in rural districts where the SPD would have trouble electing representatives or even electors, socialist voters should sometimes support the Liberals and that such aid would compensate potential Liberal losses to the social democrats in the cities. Bernstein did not find the proposal so threatening. Even if the *Vossische Zeitung* hesitated, other Liberal papers outspokenly favored cooperation, Bernstein maintained. He believed that already in the Reichstag elections many of the SPD's votes came from the middle classes. To Bernstein, it seemed contradictory to ask for bourgeois votes in the Reichstag elections and then to refuse to participate in the Prussian contest. When in Reichstag run-off elections Liberals failed to side with social democrats against Conservatives, he speculated, it was because the main election had been a bitter one. The situation would be different in the diet campaign:

In short, what has happened here and there in the Reichstag elections does not offer a correct image of what would result in a diet election taken up from the beginning not with the false slogan of "one reactionary mass," which slaps all

historical experience in the face, but rather with the rallying cry: against the agrarian-plutocratic reaction!<sup>23</sup>

Bernstein examined assumptions he supposed to be held by those opposing participation--assumptions derivable from the views of Liebknecht or the SDF. One such notion was the "one reactionary mass"; another, that economic interests alone motivated political parties. Still another was that the German proletariat would be able to handle the Junkers without help from the bourgeoisie. Bernstein wrote,

Now, it is very nice to talk with a superior air about the cowardice of the bourgeoisie and to declare that the proletariat will deal with the Reaction on its own. It reminds one of Lassalle's statement, "Give me 500,000 workers in Germany who join our association, and the Reaction is no more." The 500,000 workers have been there a long time, and our Reaction is still blooming happily. We, however, do not have the excuse one might marshal up for Lassalle; we have the experience of more than a generation of further development behind us; we have seen that things do not take shape according to a simple schema [Schablone] and culminate as many of us presupposed but instead proceed on their own in such a way that tendencies which act in our favor are counteracted by others which if not negate then at least slow down the action of the former tendencies. The declaration that some day we will finish with the Reaction on our own is a speculation on the future of the laziest kind which certainly does not remove from us responsibility for the many wounds which police and Junker rule has meanwhile inflicted on the German laborers and their organizations.

In this way, Bernstein blamed the workers' suffering on a utopianism which overlooked counter-tendencies to its model of historical development. In contrast, a mature Marxist socialism would study the actual material conditions in Germany and would seek to assist the progressive bourgeois in struggle against the Junkers to realize a democratic republic. Bernstein claimed that in England and France the

<sup>23</sup>Bernstein, "Reden oder Kämpfen. Eine zweite Epistel zur Landtagwahl-Frage," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 498-502. The article was summarized in *Vorwärts*, July 14, 1897, p. 3.

greatest democratic advances had occurred when the proletariat and bourgeoisie cooperated and that in Germany the progressive bourgeois would gain strength for opposing the conservatives if they knew that the SPD was backing them. Bernstein favored the SPD having its own elector candidates wherever possible and its seeking to have social-democratic representatives elected to the diet. For districts where the SPD did not have its own elector candidates, Bernstein proposed that social democrats vote for those willing to support a list of minimum demands. The list could also be used in the run-off elections for electors. Bernstein concluded with the concern he shared with Engels and Kautsky: The SPD should not be forced to choose between passively accepting loss of the Reichstag suffrage or else resorting to an uprising leading to violent repression.<sup>24</sup>

In his speech on June 22, Liebknecht had described the German bourgeoisie forming "one reactionary mass" with the Junkers. In his *Neue Zeit* article in early July, Bernstein had rejected the slogan as going against experience. On July 14 Mehring challenged Bernstein for dismissing the idea too quickly. Mehring admitted that the concept came not from Marx but from the Lassalleans (though not from Lassalle himself) and that in theory it was false. Still, Mehring found Bernstein wrong when he said that the slogan defied experience, when he stated that the bourgeois would fight the Reaction with greater determination if the SPD stood behind them. For Mehring, German history proved that the bourgeois liberals resisted with less strength when backed by the proletariat; they feared the workers more than the Junkers. This experience gave the phrase "one reactionary mass" its popularity.<sup>25</sup>

On July 24 *Vorwärts* published a statement from Bernstein concerning use of election statistics. More importantly, he expanded on an old idea. Bernstein had already questioned the hypothesis that bothering with the diet elections was contradicted by the prospect of the bourgeois order's imminent demise. Now he warned that for the SPD such a catastrophe could be truly disastrous:

<sup>24</sup>Bernstein, "Reden oder Kämpfen," pp. 502-505. Compare earlier, 357.

<sup>25</sup>Franz Mehring, "Die Geschichte eines Schlagworts," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 513-515. The article was dated July 14, 1897; it probably appeared around July 24.



The way party relations have developed in Germany, a collapse following from excessive pressure by the authorities could bring to power no other party than social democracy. A bourgeois-radical intermediary stage is impossible under these circumstances. But one who knows even a little history will be able to tell oneself that a catastrophe which begins with what should be its end result is truly no indubitable blessing.<sup>26</sup>

Here Bernstein could draw on his previous thinking about the material conditions required for a successful transition to socialism, including meeting the aspirations of the proletariat after it had taken control. He believed that these conditions did not yet exist in Germany, so he feared the SPD's being thrust into power. For Bernstein the imminent collapse was not only uncertain, but also unwanted. Instead, he desired an end to Junker rule—to be followed by a democratic republic and a period of capitalist development. Then the political and economic preconditions of proletarian rule and socialism could be achieved.

Around the first of August, Kautsky's *Neue Zeit* article "The Prussian Diet Elections and the Reactionary Masses" repeated many of Bernstein's arguments against Liebknecht and Mehring. In the first place, Kautsky claimed that he and other non-Prussians had a right to speak on the issue because "foreigners" often had experience with indirect elections and the loss of a workday and because the social democrats in Prussia had little experience with the diet elections. Besides, one could study Prussian statistics and suffrage law anywhere. Far from having a corrupting effect, Kautsky contended that participation in the elections would strengthen the SPD. Its agitation would reach more citizens on a wider range of issues than before. To the objection that social democrats would not understand why they should vote for the Liberals in the diet elections while fighting them for Reichstag seats, Kautsky answered that the social-democratic voters were not stupid and that the problem did not arise in the Reichstag run-off elections. Quite apart from how many representatives the SPD

<sup>26</sup>Bernstein, "Zur Frage der Beteiligung an den Landtagswahlen. Einiges zur Abwehr," *Vorwärts*, July 24, 1897, pp. 5f.

might send to the Prussian diet, Kautsky was convinced, taking part could only aid agitation for equal suffrage.<sup>27</sup>

Next Kautsky expounded a theory attributing the division within the SPD over participation to a basic division between the party's politicians and its agitators. Kautsky argued that the politicians assumed a given party size and strength and then sought through cooperation with other parties to win victories. Much as Bernstein had argued against Lerda, Kautsky maintained that the politicians rightly tried to achieve the greatest result with the least expenditure of power. To do so, they cooperated with other parties; naturally they worked most readily with those closest to their own. In contrast, Kautsky continued, the agitators wanted to increase party size and strength by winning members away from other parties. These others were accordingly seen as one opposing mass. The agitators appealed to specific social-economic classes or interest groups. Because the nearest parties appealed to the same people, these parties became the chief opponents. In Kautsky's analysis, both politicians and agitators had a place in the SPD; but their relative strength should vary with the changing size of the movement. He wrote,

The smaller a party, the less the possibility for it to pursue practical policies and to gain practical successes, the more the necessity for quick growth is in the foreground, then the more the viewpoint of the agitator will be the decisive one for it. The larger a party is, the weightier the practical consequences of its actions, then the more the viewpoint of the politician will gain prominence within it, until the two viewpoints balance and first the one and then the other steps into the foreground, depending on the circumstances. The history of social democracy in various countries shows this also.

In a later polemic with Bax, Bernstein employed an argument somewhat similar to Kautsky's analysis based on changing party size.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Kautsky, "Die preußischen Landtagswahlen und die reaktionäre Masse," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 580-582. The article was summarized in *Vorwärts*, August 4, 1897, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>Kautsky, "Die Landtagswahlen und die reaktionäre Masse," p. 583. For Bernstein on the efficient use of energy in politics, see



To Kautsky, England provided excellent examples of the two extremes—agitators vs. politicians:

England, which is otherwise the land of the "correct middle," presents a strange phenomenon. There we find a socialist organization, the Social Democratic Federation, which is filled exclusively with the spirit of the agitator and which brusquely refuses any cooperation with neighboring parties but precisely because of this makes its agitation among the practical Englishmen much more difficult; and we find the opposite extreme, the Fabians, who allow themselves to be guided so exclusively by the viewpoints of the practical politician that in chasing after practical successes they entirely lose sight of concern for the independence, unity, and power of the party and thereby deprive themselves of the most powerful tool of political might.

Kautsky judged that in the SPD the agitator's way of thinking was stronger than one would expect for the party's size. The imbalance occurred because Germany lacked parliamentary government; the party's victories occurred more in the Reichstag elections than in the Reichstag itself. In the face of this emphasis on agitation instead of politics, Kautsky found it understandable that the proposal to compromise with other parties would generate controversy. Still, despite the danger of internal conflict, the SPD should participate in the diet elections.<sup>29</sup>

Kautsky warned against using slogans like "one reactionary mass." He related the concept to the division between agitators and politicians. He argued that the slogan fit Lassalle and that Lassalle was more an agitator than a politician. Kautsky admitted that the idea suited an age when the workers' movement required sharp demarcation from the bourgeois liberal party. Still, mistakes occurred in the earlier period, Kautsky maintained. For example, people underestimated the struggle against the bourgeois order and supposed that the proletariat need not concern itself with issues other than socialism—issues like

Bernstein, "Klassenkampf und Kompromiß," pp. 518, and above, 356f. For Bernstein's argument like Kautsky's on the changing nature of a party, see below, 393-395.

<sup>29</sup>Kautsky, "Die Landtagswahlen und die reaktionäre Masse," p. 584.

tariffs or trade unions. No wonder Marx hated the slogan "one reactionary mass"! According to Kautsky, bourgeois society was more complicated than the phrase allowed; among the other parties many differences remained.<sup>30</sup>

At this juncture Kautsky returned to the idea he had originally urged Bernstein to use against Lerda: Compromise would protect party unity, not weaken it. To Kautsky, it was as wrong to imagine that the SPD could unify all those groups dissatisfied with the Reich as it was to think that all opponents of the SPD formed one conservative block. In Kautsky's opinion, attempts to bring non-proletarian classes into the party either failed or else laid the foundation for later dissension. He thought that cooperation with other parties or classes would have an entirely different outcome. No doubt, differences between the SPD and the allied groups would arise. But these fluctuating relationships need not affect the unity of the SPD, so long as its working-class character remained.<sup>31</sup>

During the Revisionist Controversy, Kautsky would turn against Bernstein in part because he had decided that Bernstein had abandoned the proletarian character of the SPD. It would appear that by the summer of 1897 Bernstein had not done so.<sup>32</sup>

In assessing the German bourgeoisie in his article "The Prussian Diet Elections and the Reactionary Masses," Kautsky again favored the optimistic judgement of Bernstein over the pessimistic view of Mehring and Liebknecht. Kautsky found the slogan "one reactionary mass" particularly mistaken just then, when the middle-classes in Germany were becoming more and more upset with Junker rule. Kautsky borrowed Bernstein's observation that in Great Britain the landowners had borne the fall in land rents. In Germany the Junkers had used their political power to shift the agrarian crisis onto others—onto the

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 584-586.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 586. Kautsky's views on participation in the Prussian diet elections are summarized in Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 113f.

<sup>32</sup>That Kautsky later suspected Bernstein of wishing to abandon the proletarian character of the SPD is reflected in Kautsky, *Bernstein und das sozialdemokratische Programm. Eine Antikritik* (Stuttgart, 1899), pp. 178f.; and in KK-EB October 23, 1898. The letter is quoted below, 410.

capitalists as well as the workers. Kautsky postulated that the bourgeois feared the Junkers' threat to good trade accords, to the price of raw materials, to moderate taxes, and to the normal functioning of the business world. Kautsky continued,

These demands begin to frighten and trouble the bourgeoisie much more than those of the social democracy, for one reason because the political power of the Junkers is still greater today and the realization of their programs accordingly nearer but then too because the bourgeoisie finally does understand that the social democrats are the heirs to today's mode of production and as such are themselves interested in its development, whereas the Junkers are desperate, bankrupt, ready to purchase a brief reprieve for themselves with the economic ruin of the whole nation.<sup>33</sup>

Against Bax's opinion that bourgeois capitalism was evil and should be helped to collapse, here Kautsky implicitly concurred with Bernstein that capitalism laid the economic groundwork upon which socialism would arise.

Against Liebknecht and Mehring, Kautsky argued that the German bourgeois in 1897 played a different political role than in 1848. The battle against Junker power was a life and death struggle for the bourgeoisie. Contradictory policies had undermined faith in authority. Kautsky saw a vicious circle developing as the government turned more and more to the Junkers; the Junkers exploited the state to shore up their economic position; the abuse raised public opposition to the government, which made it rely more on the Junkers. The vicious circle would end in political catastrophe:

. . . we are heading toward a period of difficult political battles, the result of which can only be either a complete suppression of all democratic forces in the Reich, a perhaps short reaction but one involving infinite sacrifices, or the final overcoming of the remains of absolutism and feudalism and the transformation of Germany into a modern state, a state which does not yet mean the political rule of the proletariat but which offers the proletariat the foundation on

<sup>33</sup>Kautsky, "Die Landtagswahlen und die reaktionäre Masse," p. 587. For Bernstein on English agriculture, see earlier, 319.

which it can attain political power in a peaceful way.

No less than this is at stake today. But if this picture fits reality, then the phrase about one reactionary mass was never less appropriate, never more misleading than right now.<sup>34</sup>

Shortly after this second essay by Kautsky on the Prussian diet elections, Bebel wrote in favor of participation. If nothing else, Bebel's *Neue Zeit* article reveals a danger in interpreting Bernstein's favoring participation as evidence of his abandoning Marxist socialism. In light of the Revisionist Controversy, the article is important for another reason too. Bebel argued that Bernstein overestimated the German bourgeoisie because of his England experience. Bernstein's sojourn in Great Britain would later become a common explanation of why he had developed his heterodox views.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps Bernstein's time in Britain did contribute to his overestimating the German bourgeoisie, though it is important to remember that Kautsky made the same judgement. In any case, perhaps Bernstein's English milieu influenced his analysis of the Prussian diet elections in another way. The arguments he developed in favor of participating specifically contradicted ideas of the SDF as well as of Liebknecht—for example, Bernstein's opposition to the slogan

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 587-589. By 1897 Kautsky allowed for an imminent political catastrophe leading to the end of Junker rule.

<sup>35</sup>August Bebel, "Unsere Beteiligung an den preußischen Landtagswahlen," *Neue Zeit*, XVb (1897), 608-617. The reference to Bernstein and England is on p. 611: "I am, then, for participating in the Prussian diet elections even though I do not share Bernstein's view, which appears to me to have been confused by experiences in England, about the continuing improbability of our [German] Liberals and on this agree far more with Mehring."

Bebel's support for participation is seen in Bebel to Kautsky, June 12, 1897, in *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky, Jr., ed. (Assen, 1971), p. 101; and also in Bebel to Adler, June 5, 1897, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Friedrich Adler, ed. (Vienna, 1954), pp. 231f., where Bebel explained the need to encourage the bourgeois parties in light of an imminent catastrophe. On August 2 Adler wrote Bebel that at least participation would expose the unfairness of the three-class franchise; Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 235.

"one reactionary mass," to the notion of imminent catastrophe, to thinking that the proletariat could rule immediately, to believing that the economy was ready for socialism. Or consider Bernstein's convictions that the SPD should take responsibility for national policy, that capitalism prepared the economic foundation of socialism, and that the SPD should cooperate with progressive bourgeois parties. Later such opinions became central issues in the Revisionist Controversy.

The debate over participation in the Prussian diet elections may have shaped the Revisionist Controversy in yet another respect. In October 1897 the Hamburg party congress voted to participate, but there was strong resistance; and the resolution forbid compromise. When Bebel tried to refer the matter to the Reichstag delegation, he met fervent opposition. Finally, the Stuttgart party congress in October 1898 chose to allow each electoral district to resolve to participate or not.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps those social democrats who so resisted participating were angry with the author of the proposal that they do so—Eduard Bernstein. If they identified him with betraying party principles, perhaps with rejecting revolution altogether, it could have biased their reading of his writings. Ironically, during the Revisionist Controversy social democrats may have interpreted Bernstein in an anti-socialist sense in part because he had just defended Marx's teaching on cooperation with the progressive bourgeois.

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<sup>36</sup>Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, pp. 179-183. Discussion of the Prussian election issue is found in ZSAP, Reichskanzlei, Nr. 647/1, Bl. 8; and LHAP 13128, Bl. 207. The last is a police report on a private meeting of the social-democratic leaders (Vertrauensmänner) of Berlin on November 17, 1897. The police recounted: "The result of the meeting was the unanimous acceptance of a decision according to which if Bebel's efforts are given in to and the Reichstag delegation settles the issue in some other way, a stand should be taken against this action by holding protest demonstrations." The police concluded: "Berlin social democrats entering the diet elections appears out of the question for now."

Accounts of debates on the Prussian diet elections filled *Vorwärts* for the last third of 1897. See also the articles in *Neue Zeit*, XVIa (1897-98) by Bebel, pp. 196-203, 293-300, and 400f.; by Kautsky, pp. 356-363; by Liebknecht, pp. 260-269; and by Paul Singer, pp. 324-329.

## Chapter Eight: The Last Months Before the Controversy

### A. Strict Marxism (Late August)

At the end of August 1897, an exchange of letters between Bernstein and Kautsky recorded both their slowly diverging understandings of what Marxism meant and also the profound change in Bernstein's thinking during his repeated confrontations with Liebknecht, Bax, Hyndman, and now Mehring too. Perhaps in reply to a proposal from Kautsky, Bernstein wrote, "That I would not edit the *N.Zt.* in a 'strict Marxist' fashion I set aside entirely, for I hope that you do not do so either. Or you give the term 'Marxist' a very broad meaning." Bernstein reminded his friend that long ago they had discussed what it meant to be followers of Marx:

You will want to be bound as little as I by all the applications Marx and Engels derived from their theory. Even as disciples or perhaps . . . because we are their disciples we must act critically towards M. and E.

Bernstein related how he felt required to do so, even on politically neutral questions:

Today I do not have the time to go into detail, but you will understand when I characterize my present relationship to M. and E. by saying that I . . . deliberately continue to work with the method they developed but that any more I recognize their results only partially.

On some important contemporary questions, Bernstein warned, Marx and Engels said nothing or were misleading. "In short, if we want to be Marxists, we can . . . no longer be strict Marxists. On the contrary, I feel at every opportunity the need to oppose the Marx-craving of our young people." Bernstein complained about one caricature of Marxism which he felt they should not tolerate. Bernstein believed that Kautsky agreed but feared that Kautsky's "orthodoxy" discouraged people and thereby limited the effect of his presentation of a scientific Marxism. Bernstein promised an article on "Class Struggle and Reactionary



Masses": "I am curious how it will suit you, for in appearance it will be pure heresy against Marxism."<sup>1</sup>

This response from Bernstein might well have worried Kautsky. Admittedly, on the one hand, Bernstein seemed still to hold the mature Marxist ideas they had long shared. Apparently, he still subscribed to historical materialism, the Marxist method of social analysis. Here Bernstein did not renounce anything which he did not expect Kautsky to reject also. Kautsky, like Bernstein, had already challenged some of Marx's specific results--for example, his supposed views on the Eastern Question. Kautsky had questioned certain inferences from Marx about the decline of the middle classes in agriculture and in some branches of industry. Kautsky also realized that Marx and Engels altered their opinions. Perhaps Bernstein's article in *The Progressive Review* reminded Kautsky that in his 1895 Introduction Engels had admitted he and Marx had been wrong on certain points in 1848-1850 and that they had subsequently changed their minds. Later Kautsky would argue that some of their insights from the late 1840's and early 1850's should be reconsidered. These issues raised in Bernstein's letter of late August 1897 need not have troubled Kautsky unduly.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, it seems that Bernstein no longer associated the terms "strict Marxist" and "Marxism" with the ideas he shared with Kautsky. Apparently, to Bernstein, the "strict Marxist" parroted certain phrases, no matter how incorrect or irrelevant these might be, and anticipated violent social or political change. Here Bernstein associated "Marxism" in a narrow sense not with scholars like Kautsky but with young enthusiasts.

On August 30 Kautsky replied that he seldom used the phrase "strict Marxism" in public and then sought to explain what he had intended.

I of course did not mean an inflexible clinging to all the results that Marx and Engels reached--that would be the opposite of Marxism. I view . . . the N.Z. primarily as an organ of criticism, that is, of self-criticism; and it is precisely

<sup>1</sup>EB-KK August 26, 1897. The letter is also cited by Thomas Meyer, *Bernsteins konstruktiver Sozialismus. Eduard Bernsteins Beitrag zur Theorie des Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1977), p. 33. KK-EB August 21, 1897. On being a disciple of Marx, compare earlier, 296, 340, and 351.

<sup>2</sup>See above, 341, 93, 303, and 309 note 16.

this characteristic which makes us so many enemies.

But one cannot exercise criticism . . . for its own sake, into the blue; one has to have a goal and a perspective, and that for us is . . . the Marxist one. Our method must be Marxist and our principles the two greatest principles of Marxism: the materialist conception of history and its . . . application to our time, the conviction that the proletariat is the driving force of the coming social development.

. . . Other results of Marx-Engels research can, in my opinion, be overcome and still leave Marxism as a vibrant force.<sup>3</sup>

Marxism for Kautsky was a method of analyzing historical evolution, focusing on changes in the forces and the relationships of production. The method's implication of crucial importance to Kautsky was that in the present era the proletariat would be responsible for social and political progress.

In his August 30 letter to Bernstein, Kautsky implied that the principles of Marxism would be lasting ones. The proposition that all truths would eventually be overcome was a misinterpretation of the dialectic, he thought. Kautsky pointed to mathematics. He conceded,

I could very well imagine a critique of Marxist value theory according to Marxist methods and from a Marxist perspective.

But should . . . the materialist conception of history and the understanding of the proletariat as the driving force in the coming social revolution be overcome, . . . then I would be finished, then my life would have no content left.

Kautsky insisted that the purpose of *Neue Zeit* was the "critical deepening" and "practical application" not the "overcoming" of Marxism.<sup>4</sup> At this point Kautsky and Bernstein disagreed as to which

<sup>3</sup>KK-EB August 30, 1897; also quoted in Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Zur Ideologie der Partei vor dem 1. Weltkrieg* (Hanover, 1967), p. 77. Compare Kautsky's summary of Marxism given above, 254.

<sup>4</sup>KK-EB August 30, 1897. Also quoted in Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854-1938. Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh, 1978), p. 120.

set of ideas the term "Marxism" referred, but presumably they still agreed on which ideas they held and which they opposed.

Then on September 1 Bernstein responded in a letter which showed that his differences from Kautsky were becoming more than a matter of terminology. Bernstein counted as part of the Marxist method a notion which Kautsky would not have included even among its results; and Bernstein argued that Marx and Engels had altered their method itself. Bernstein stated that he had become eclectic,

It is this disposition, too, which now makes me so critical vis-à-vis Marxism. I have discovered various weak points in it, . . . weak points regarding the results, but still significant enough not to leave the theory itself completely untouched.

By "Marxist theory" Bernstein no longer denoted various misinterpretations of Marxism. Rather, he believed that he had discovered problems affecting the theory as he and Kautsky had learned it from Engels.<sup>5</sup>

Bernstein referred to Kautsky's last letter where he had denied that the dialectic meant that all principles would eventually be falsified. Bernstein believed that even the theory of Marx and Engels had changed: Sometimes they saw the dialectic much as Kautsky did. (Here, perhaps, Bernstein referred to Marx and Engels envisioning social change occurring gradually.) But sometimes when they applied their theory, they portrayed the dialectic as much more absolute. (Perhaps Bernstein thought of Marx's writings on the 1848 Revolution in France.) Bernstein claimed that the young Marxists took this more radical approach, which he considered dangerous because it distorted events. Proudhon had confessed that his faith in the dialectic was mistaken. Bernstein explained,

The partial contradiction is resolved, but the rest of the body is affected only indirectly and has not changed very much. This is how I understand . . . the social dialectic, as I already indicated in the "Problems."

Bernstein continued that his doubts about Marxism coalesced with reading *Capital* volume three.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>EB-KK September 1, 1897.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* See also above, 188.

Earlier Bernstein had found some of Marx and Engels's results wrong because they had supposedly applied a correct method to inadequate information. For example, their overestimating the degree of industrial development in France in 1848 had caused them mistakenly to anticipate economic crises and violent revolution and to judge Blanqui a true leader of the French proletariat. Now Bernstein had decided that Marx and Engels were mistaken because of a faulty component in their method itself—a violent dialectic.

## B. Youth Labor (September)

In his September 1 letter to Kautsky, Bernstein mentioned sending an article on the employment of youth—a sensitive topic, he acknowledged, but one needing discussion. "It will not do that out of sheer 'radicalism' our people allow themselves to be pushed to demands which are useless for the 'society of the future' and cannot be carried out in the present." He believed that the issue of child labor should be addressed before the one of youth employment. For Bernstein, the problem was again the SDF and its practice of making demands inappropriate to the present stage of social-economic development. Bernstein commented that even Liebknecht thought the SDF should find more-realistic policies.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Bernstein had read the August 14, 1897, editorial in *Justice*. There Quelch outlined the SDF's position on child labor. He wrote,

Of all the evils arising from the curse of capitalism none is worse than the enslavement, exploitation, and slaughter of children. During the whole of its existence the S.D.F. has championed the cause of the little ones, and persistently agitated against them being exploited, maimed, and massacred in the factories or starved in the schools.

Quelch condemned the "half-time system," which combined factory work with a half day of school, and advocated public maintenance of school children to age 16.<sup>2</sup>

In his *Neue Zeit* article, "Socialism and the Employment of Youth in Industry," Bernstein first recalled that the Zurich congress on labor legislation recommended that young people be required to attend school and be forbidden to have employment until age 15. He agreed that regulations on leaving school and those for beginning employment should be coordinated. However, he asked whether keeping all children in school until 15 was not unsound pedagogically. One should not force them to attend school just to keep them out of the factories. Bernstein specifically mentioned the SDF's position, where even a

<sup>1</sup>EB-KK September 1, 1897.

<sup>2</sup>Harry Quelch, "Child-Labour and Free Maintenance," *Justice*, August 14, 1897, p. 4.

minimum age of 16 for employment was considered too little, and the resolution of the London Congress for free tuition and suggesting public support until age 21.<sup>3</sup>

To Bernstein, these proposals overestimated the value of book learning for the years in question. He admitted that some might accuse him of borrowing an argument from capitalists who wished to exploit the labor of youth, but he warned that one should objectively study the effect of regulations on social development. He observed that social democrats once deemed it wrong for women to work in factories but that now they admitted that the judgment was reactionary. However, perhaps his most telling argument against the SDF was his claim that Marx had recognized the value to young people of combining school work with handicrafts, including productive labor under certain specific conditions. Bernstein quoted from *Capital* volume one to document the point.<sup>4</sup>

Bernstein outlined what he judged a realistic social-democratic policy on this issue and then defended it against the more common objections: Young people should acquire skill in handicrafts in school. For such activity not to become ridiculous, it would need to advance to vocational training, which could occur only outside school. Accordingly, at the age of 14, youth who displayed no particular inclination to further academic study could be allowed to shift primarily to handicraft work, with careful regulation and with opportunity for additional education. Bernstein supposed that much social-democratic support for raising the minimum age for employment rested on the idea that the factory was evil. He believed that Marx and Engels had hoped that under proper conditions the mixing of people of different ages and sexes in the factory would make possible a humane process of development. Other socialists favoring productive work for youth included Owen and Fourier.<sup>5</sup>

Bernstein anticipated the counter-argument that where earlier theorists imagined workers producing for the community, under

<sup>3</sup>Bernstein, "Der Sozialismus und die gewerbliche Arbeit der Jugend," *Neue Zeit*, XVIa (1897-98), 37 and 44. Earlier, 211f.

<sup>4</sup>Bernstein, "Gewerbliche Arbeit der Jugend," pp. 37-39.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 40-42. For Kautsky on capitalism as a relative good, see earlier, 373f.



capitalism they produced for the capitalists or for the market. He conceded,

Today the worker indeed produces only indirectly . . . for society. Nevertheless modern socialism, when it emphasizes this, still sees in the modern development of the mode of production the foundation for the development of socialist society.

Hence it would be wrong to judge the employment of youth on the present conflict of capital and labor rather than on what was best for the young people. According to Bernstein, the "older Socialists" used their detailed plans for future society more as a device to present their ideas. Modern social democrats rejected such plans, but they ran the risk of becoming lost in local or particular interests of the class struggle. Bernstein described the class struggle as an "elemental force" where daily concerns or special interests could dominate when knowledge of the general movement was lacking. At the time of his translation of Hobson, Bernstein had already observed that efficient progress required a theory analyzing actual conditions—not mere opportunism without theory, on the one hand, or a dogmatic vision of class conflict and future social development, on the other.<sup>6</sup>

In his article on the employment of youth, Bernstein doubted the device of making unrealistic proposals in order to win at least modest reform. Often the artifice had the same effect as demanding a part of the moon, he thought; people simply dismissed the proposal. A sensible demand must fit with the given conditions. Bernstein's criticism of another SDF policy did not pass unnoticed. On October 16 *Justice* complained,

Herr Bernstein's articles are now chiefly interesting as special pleadings for reactionary theories. If there is any position on any subject which is specially repugnant to Social-Democrats that position is sure to find an advocate in Herr Bernstein.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Bernstein, "Gewerbliche Arbeit der Jugend," pp. 42f. Compare earlier, 274f.

<sup>7</sup>*Justice*, October 16, 1897, p. 1. Bernstein, "Gewerbliche Arbeit der Jugend," p. 43. See also EB-KK September 6, 1897.

### C. The Review of Sighele (November)

Of the characteristics of the interpretations of Marx which Bernstein opposed, two which greatly disturbed him were glorifying the proletariat and confusing the proletariat with "the people" in general. He had criticized the first practice in his contribution to the "Three-Star Article" in 1879. He had compared it to an earlier bourgeois revolutionary tradition's fetishistic emphasis on "the people." Bernstein criticized Mehring's picture of the workers. In his additions to Hérietier's book, Bernstein challenged one image of the French people.<sup>1</sup>

In a November 1897 review of a book by Scipio Sighele, Bernstein questioned attributing too great a revolutionary potential to the heterogeneous crowd. In his Fabian speech, Bernstein had quoted Marx's 1850 attack on revolutionaries who turned "the people" or "the proletariat" into a fetish. Now Bernstein feared social democrats were doing the same with "the masses" or "the crowd" (*die Menge*):

Many socialists and especially the school of French social revolutionaries retain an almost mystical faith in the anonymous crowd. . . . In almost all revolutionaries who have gone through the neo-Jacobinic and Blanquistic school, one finds the same tendency to attribute super-human, intensified revolutionary qualities to the anonymous, tumultuous crowd.

This fetishism, which differs only in degree from the populist cult of the democrats and the tendency prevalent in social democracy today to imagine the modern industrial worker to be an ideal human being standing above the weaknesses of the rest of humanity, can lay claim to uncontested facts.

For an example, Bernstein observed that the crowd had played a crucial role in the French Revolution and in the February Revolution of 1848. Whenever the masses took to the streets, something unexpected could happen. Bernstein speculated,

Perhaps it is most of all this incalculability of the crowd which drives the social revolutionaries, who are so proud of

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<sup>1</sup>See earlier, 11, 156, 302f., and 312f. On the relationship of an idealized picture of the proletariat to Bernstein's rejection of "Blanquism," see Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 158-164 and 382.

their lack of religious faith, to devote an almost religious cult to it. It is the veneration of the uncontrollable elements in a different form.

Later Bernstein would place Bax in this French revolutionary tradition, in contrast to the German Marxist one.<sup>2</sup>

According to Bernstein, everyone realized that people behaved differently in a group than they did as individuals. Now an Italian anthropologist had sought to discover why, to probe the psyche of the crowd. Sighele belonged to the tradition of Cesare Lombroso and Enrico Ferri, which emphasized inherited traits in the determining of criminal behavior.<sup>3</sup> Sighele applied this insight to the conduct of masses of people and particularly to the criminal acts which sometimes accompanied mobs.

Bernstein related that Sighele had studied both spontaneous, differentiated masses and lasting, homogeneous ones. He had discovered

that the tumultuous crowd is in most cases more capable of bad actions than good ones, of destruction than creation, of slaughter than self-sacrifice. . . . But he maintains that in any crowd of people from the start the tendency toward the bad lies more on the surface than the tendency toward the good.

Bernstein listed Sighele's arguments for this opinion: First, the intellectual level of the mass was that of its average member. The exceptional talents and genius of people could not be added together, rather only that which all members possessed. Second, participation in a group sensitized one's emotions. Third, a person in a crowd had a greater tendency toward anger because the inclination to anger was one of the most primitive of the inherited characteristics of human beings. Fourth, in a group the man or woman was similarly more receptive to

<sup>2</sup>Bernstein, "Die Menge und das Verbrechen," *Neue Zeit*, XVIa (1897-98), 229f. For Bernstein's finding Bax in the French revolutionary tradition, see earlier, 120. Bernstein also placed Liebknecht in the French tradition, but perhaps in a different sense. Earlier, 15.

<sup>3</sup>Bernstein, "Die Menge und das Verbrechen," p. 230.

suggestion from others because imitation was also a very basic, inherited trait. Since feelings like hatred brought more visible gesticulations than did emotions like compassion, persons in a mass would be swayed by others more often to act in hostile ways.<sup>4</sup>

According to Bernstein, Sighele thought that the behavior of one crowd might vary from that of another depending on the race or customs of the people involved. Bernstein asserted that English, German, and French crowds would not behave alike and that a group of upper-class citizens would behave differently than a mass of poor people. Profound differences might exist even between two crowds from the lower classes. Bernstein contrasted the Lumpenproletariat behind the barricades at Fountainbleau in June 1848 with the workers defending the barricades at St. Antoine. He stressed that a crowd might more easily incline toward criminal actions when many criminals or adventurers participated. Bernstein stated that in February 1848 the mass movement in Paris was so powerful that these types were outnumbered by responsible citizens but that even then some barbaric acts occurred. He warned that usually in uprisings the respectable people stayed home, abandoning the streets to the ruffians, the thoughtless, and the inexperienced.<sup>5</sup>

After summarizing implications of Sighele's work for the question of responsibility, Bernstein concluded with a sharp caveat for all who thought "the masses" capable of establishing socialism: The crowd could be reactionary as well as revolutionary; it was more likely to destroy than to create. Social democrats should pay attention to the crowd, but they should not worship it.<sup>6</sup>

Some 16 months after Bernstein reviewed Sighele, on March 21, 1899, Kautsky wrote Adler to dispute Bernstein's recent claim that the change in his thought had been recognized by Engels. Kautsky insisted that he and Bernstein had agreed up until the "Final-Goal Article" against Bax (in late 1897 and early 1898). Kautsky added, "In autumn '97 in the article about the 'Masses and Crime,' I was surprised for the first time by Ede's animosity against any revolutionary movement." One should remember, however, that Kautsky composed this letter after the Revisionist Controversy had been continuing for

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 230-233.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 233-236.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 236f.

some time. In late 1897 his major concern about Bernstein's review of Sighele appears to have been another. On November 12 Kautsky cautioned his friend that reactionaries in Germany could exploit the article, which would help Bernstein's social-democratic opponents. Kautsky said that he had accordingly attached a note. In essence, the note argued that Sighele's observations applied primarily to spontaneous mobs of thoughtless people--not to demonstrations by organized and disciplined workers. The answer to potential mob violence in German cities lay not in a strengthened police but in expanded workers' organization.<sup>7</sup>

Bebel shared Kautsky's concern, writing him on November 16, 1897,

I consider Ede's article in today's issue of *Neue Zeit* to be very dubitable. Based on what he admits, a reactionary can justify forbidding any assembly, especially in periods of excitement or about questions that could provoke excitement. It may be nice to desire objectivity and the quest to rectify biased judgements and pronouncements in one's own party, but all too easily one can get oneself into a wrong position.

One should not forget that only shortly before, the SPD had fought legislation in the Prussian diet which would have allowed the police to dissolve meetings which appeared to threaten the peace.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Kautsky to Adler March 21, 1899, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Friedrich Adler, ed. (Vienna, 1954), p. 304; quoted in Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," to *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky, Jr., ed. (Assen, 1971), p. xxxi. KK-EB November 12, 1897; *Neue Zeit*, XVIa (1897-98), 235.

<sup>8</sup>Bebel to Kautsky November 16, 1897, in *Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Kautsky*, p. 102. Earlier, 359.

#### D. The "Final-Goal Article" (December)

In the months since Engels's death, Ernest Belfort-Bax, H. M. Hyndman, or others in the SDF had confronted Eduard Bernstein over British domestic politics, South Africa, the Eastern Question, economic theory, social and political reforms, youth labor, and indirectly over the limits of historical materialism (since Bernstein was closely associated with Kautsky and had aided him against Bax). The increasingly bitter distaste of some English socialists for the London correspondent of *Vorwärts* and editor of *Neue Zeit* surfaced in *Justice* editorials. The hostility erupted again in a late 1897 essay for *Neue Zeit*.

In "Colonial Policy and Chauvinism" Bax attacked Bernstein for supporting the extension of modern culture, which Bax identified with capitalism. Bax found Bernstein's thought typical of a capitalist who desired to exploit the colonies. It violated the principle of socialism. To show that colonialism harmed a native population, Bax contrasted life in a European colony to life in Morocco: In the first, the arrival of capitalism meant the end of the native mode of production and exchange, contract work which allegedly combined the worst aspects of traditional slavery and modern wage labor, and the importation of manufactured items. In the second, one supposedly discovered inexpensive food, since the export of grain was prohibited. The government discouraged technology and forbid highways and wheeled vehicles; it sought to prevent the coming of commercialism and industry. With production at a primitive stage, laborers could own their tools. Bax reported that visitors praised the simple customs and well being of the people. According to Bax, for Morocco to fall to capitalism would bring a major disadvantage to the population--its descent into the proletariat. Why would the editors of *Neue Zeit* want such a horrible thing?<sup>1</sup>

Bax answered that Kautsky and Bernstein probably upheld colonialism because they mistakenly believed that each society could reach socialism only by passing through capitalism. Bax retorted,

<sup>1</sup>E. Belfort-Bax, "Kolonialpolitik und Chauvinismus," *Neue Zeit*, XVIa (1897-98), 420-423. This section revealed Bax's opposition to Western technology and modern civilization. Compare Ernest Belfort-Bax, *The Religion of Socialism. Being Essays in Modern Socialist Criticism* (London, n.d. [1887]), pp. 76f.; and Bax, *Will Socialism Benefit the English People? A Written Debate Between Ernest Belfort Bax and Charles Bradlaugh* (London, 1887), p. 9



Those who hold this view, it seems to me, may indeed have studied their history poorly. For they overlook the important fact that in each larger period of human development only certain races have been chosen, by what we like to call historical selection, to be the actual carrier of culture in this period and therefore must go through all the corresponding developmental stages. Other peoples are simply carried along by the aforementioned once they come in contact with them. The current culture of the advanced people is stamped upon them; and in a short time, often no more than a few generations if they do not die out, they arrive in substance fully at the same level without having gone through any developmental process in the real sense.

If Bernstein were correct, Bax continued, then all peoples on earth would first need to suffer capitalism before socialism could occur; but Engels thought it best that primitive peoples simply be left alone. Most socialists could see that it was not good to replace a natural society with a modern industrial state, but apparently not Bernstein "in his enthusiasm for capitalism and the English Liberal Party."<sup>2</sup>

However, for Bax the conviction of Kautsky and Bernstein on colonization contained another important implication. Bax returned to the argument he had used in the polemics on South Africa and Turkey in 1896: The success of capitalism abroad meant the delay of revolution at home. In the *Communist Manifesto* and other writings, Marx and Engels stated that the expansion of the market could postpone business crises. Apparently, Bax assumed that such crises constituted the Zusammenbruch he considered essential to rid the world of capitalism and to open the way to socialism.<sup>3</sup> Bax maintained that the connection between colonialism and collapse explained the rush to acquire colonies and also demanded social-democratic opposition to colonialism—not only because it violated native peoples but also because it prolonged European capitalism and delayed the advent of socialism.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 423f.

<sup>3</sup>See earlier, 38-41, 170-172, and 279f.

<sup>4</sup>Bax, "Kolonialpolitik und Chauvinismus," pp. 424f.

Bax had Bernstein in mind when he berated those who accepted colonialism in itself and limited their criticism to the manner in which it was conducted:

They reject the position of the [social-democratic] party, and the gentlemen call it reason and temperance. According to the fashion of the day, they despise "the revolutionary phrase" until there is not a thought behind their statements that would not be appropriate in the "Vossische Zeitung" or the "Daily Chronicle."

Bax emphasized,

They completely abandon the final goal of the socialist movement in favor of the circle of ideas in today's bourgeois liberalism and Radicalism, and this they call practical political sense and "seeing things as they are."

In contrast, a consistent socialist policy, in Bax's opinion, would oppose anything that offered capitalism a way out. For example, one should seek to maintain the status quo in the Ottoman Empire in order to protect western Asia. Some hoped that if Africa could be quickly conquered then the Zusammenbruch could be postponed indefinitely. For socialism, colonialism posed the greatest danger of all.<sup>5</sup>

As Kautsky prepared Bax's article for publication, he wondered to which of Bernstein's writings it referred. Kautsky attached a note identifying the late 1896 essay "German Social Democracy and the Turkish Troubles" as the probable one. He quoted Bernstein that social democrats need not sympathize with the rebellions of tribes which practiced slavery or which plundered peaceful neighbors and that social democrats recognized the rights of a higher culture. Kautsky felt that Bax had misunderstood the passage in a manner very different from what Bernstein intended. Kautsky wrote,

Thus we perhaps would have been warranted simply to reject the polemic before us, for a discussion which on the one side consists primarily in personal corrections does not promise to bear much fruit. But we have difficulty deciding to suppress

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 425 and 427. For Bernstein and criticizing the way colonialism occurred, compare above, 285.

an attack directed against us or one of our permanent co-workers.

Besides, the differences between the positions of Bax and Bernstein on this question do not depend on mere misunderstandings; they are real and deep; and making the differences clear can only be useful.<sup>6</sup>

On November 18 Bernstein wrote Kautsky that he generally disliked placing notes on articles. To avoid a further statement from Bax, in the note they should not attack his views but rather just say that he had misrepresented the position of *Neue Zeit* and that accordingly there would be a reply. Bernstein surmised that Bax may have been referring to the earlier essay "The New California"—where, indeed, Bernstein had suggested that capitalist expansion overseas delayed the Zusammenbruch in Europe. Conversely, Bernstein now conceded that slowing the expansion might accelerate the collapse of bourgeois society, though he still found Bax's catastrophe theory ridiculous. We have seen that for Bernstein expansion was an essential quality of capitalism, to halt it within the capitalist system utopian.<sup>7</sup>

Apparently, Kautsky proposed cutting the note, for on November 29 Bernstein wrote that doing so would be acceptable, though sad. Bernstein worried that after he had already begun composing a rejoinder, Bax might change the article. Earlier Bernstein had explained to Kautsky that one could answer Bax and elaborate a new idea, rather than just pursue a distasteful polemic. Still earlier, Bernstein had mentioned themes he wished to explore in *Neue Zeit*—economic development and class struggle, romanticism and utopianism. Bernstein embodied thoughts on these topics in his December 1897 reply to Bax, the controversial "Final-Goal Article," which appeared in *Neue Zeit* in January 1898.<sup>8</sup>

It was in the second part of this essay, "The Struggle of Social Democracy and the Revolution of Society," that Bernstein uttered his best known words about the "final goal of socialism," as commonly understood, meaning nothing to him, the "movement" everything. Ever

<sup>6</sup> *Neue Zeit*, XVIa (1897-98), 420f.

<sup>7</sup> EB-KK November 18, 1897; and see earlier, 164f.

<sup>8</sup> EB-KK November 29, 1897; EB-KK September 29, 1897; EB-KK September 6, 1897.

since, people have discussed what he meant.<sup>9</sup> Whether or not the specific wording was prompted by Bax's challenge, I believe that in the opening paragraphs of his reply Bernstein included characteristics of what the terms "Endziel" and "Bewegung" meant for him. He did so in a manner somewhat resembling Kautsky's recent contrast between small and large parties, between agitation and politics.<sup>10</sup> Bernstein wrote,

In all countries where the socialist party has reached political significance we observe the same phenomenon, that an inner transformation takes place. Former exaggerations in phrase and argumentation are shed; the blind enthusiasm for generalizations lessens; one no longer speculates on how the bearskin will be distributed when the general Kladderadatsch is over; one is really not all that much preoccupied with this interesting occurrence but rather studies the details of daily problems and searches for levers and starting points to move the development of society on this basis forward in the socialist direction.

The transformation occurred in various ways in various nations, according to Bernstein. It appeared to be a falling away from principle, so it often met fierce resistance. As an example, Bernstein named the Jungen. To defend their position, one newspaper had cited Marx's "Circular Letter" of March 1850; but it had overlooked the

<sup>9</sup> For example, Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 296-298; Helga Grebing, *Der Revisionismus. Von Bernstein bis zum "Prager Frühling"* (Munich, 1977), pp. 20f.; G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought* (London, 1953-56), III, 277; Hans-Josef Steinberg, "Karl Kautsky und Eduard Bernstein," in *Deutsche Historiker*, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ed. (Göttingen, 1972), IV, 60; Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, p. 95. On Bernstein's associating the "final goal" with utopianism see Detlef Lehnert, "Die Rezeption Bernsteins in der 'linken' Kritik," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus. Bericht über den wissenschaftlichen Kongreß "Die historische Leistung und aktuelle Bedeutung Eduard Bernsteins,"* Horst Heimann and Thomas Meyer, eds. (Bonn - Bad Godesberg, 1978), p. 377, and Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 297f.

<sup>10</sup> On Bax's wording, see Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 296; earlier, 391. For Kautsky on small and large parties, see earlier, 371.

profound changes in the 40 years between 1850 and 1890, including further development in Marx's own thought.<sup>11</sup>

Bernstein believed that the position of a social-democratic party on any tactical question (for example, its attitude toward colonialism) was determined by two types of preconditions (Voraussetzungen): (a) the actual material and political conditions and (b) the party's theoretical insight into these conditions. Both sets of preconditions evolved constantly. Bernstein admitted,

This sounds like a truism and should be one, but in reality we find the rule often ignored. Particularly those people believe that they can ignore it who wait for the full realization of socialism by a great general collapse, in which they see the fundamental precondition for the final victory of socialism.

Doctrinaire radicals refused to recognize facts contradicting their preconceptions, Bernstein alleged.

For when doctrine becomes caprice--and there are Don Quixotes of the revolution as there are ones of legitimacy--then those who profess it must never admit that anything significant has changed in their presuppositions. From every nook and cranny they will collect explanations for facts which they find uncomfortable; but one thing they will fearfully avoid: researching the real causes and connections in a proper manner.

Then Bernstein asked whether both kinds of preconditions had not altered so much that the transformation from utopian belief to precise analysis and practical politics was called for. Bernstein disclosed that he had been wanting to write about this for a long time. Then Bax's article prompted him to proceed, for the essence of Bax's attack lay in denouncing Bernstein for abandoning the "final goal of the socialist movement" in favor of bourgeois liberalism and radicalism.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Bernstein, "Der Kampf der Sozialdemokratie und die Revolution der Gesellschaft," part one "Polemisches," *Neue Zeit*, XVIa (1897-98), 484f.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 485f. The first quotation also appears in Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 179f.

These opening paragraphs suggest that Bernstein understood the words "Final Goal of Socialism" to refer to utopian belief in a specific pattern of future development, the brandishing of empty phrases, and a liking for generalization--qualities of an immature party like the SDF. The paragraphs also imply what characterized the "Movement" for him: careful study of material conditions in order to formulate policies helping society advance quickly and efficiently toward proletarian rule and socialism--i.e., what he regarded as the best characteristics of Kautsky's thinking and of a mature social-democratic party.

To expose how Bax refused Bernstein and Kautsky's attempts to correct his misrepresenting their position, Bernstein sketched a short history of the Englishman's polemics with the editors of *Neue Zeit*. Bernstein recalled Bax's article on historical materialism in *Die Zeit*, the footnote against Kautsky, and the resulting debate. At its conclusion Bax had claimed that he and Kautsky were not far apart; now Bax faulted Kautsky for economic determinism. Then Bernstein summarized the key point of his own essay on Turkey:

Not every uprising of a nation or people against its oppressors deserves without question the moral or active support of social democracy. As much as it is justified to sympathize with struggles for freedom, social democracy still must take into account the interests of the general development and the progress of civilization.

Hence, social democrats could not support the revolts of certain tribes; social democrats found a standard in the relative gains of the culture reached so far. Bernstein related that he had not imagined any socialist would disagree. Then in *Justice* Bax had accused him of Fabianism and had misrepresented his position on colonialism. Bernstein explained that he had replied in *Justice*, using references to Marx, Engels, and Lassalle to maintain that these leaders would have essentially agreed with his viewpoint. Bernstein referred to passages from the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* on the rights of Germany against Denmark concerning Schleswig-Holstein. Bernstein recounted his surprise that Bax would allegedly employ a vulgar materialistic argument which denied moral and cultural progress in the West and which led Bax to expressions like "better slavery than capitalism" and "modern civilization a curse and evil *per se*." Bernstein had asserted that Bax's proposal to stop capitalist expansion was contradictory. Again Bax had attacked; so Bernstein had answered yet another time, expressing his agreement with those seeking to protect the native



populations in the colonies. Bernstein protested that in light of this polemic, Bax's interpretation of the article on Turkey was impossible.<sup>13</sup>

Bernstein suggested that Bax's confusion stemmed from a failure to distinguish between capitalism and modern culture. To Bernstein, they were not the same. Modern culture had given the world a deep respect for the rights of the individual human being. If Bax did not wish to uphold human dignity, then why was he a socialist? Bernstein then sought quickly to dismember Bax's eulogy to non-Western Morocco. Bernstein cited uprisings, emigration to French Algeria, the export of foodstuffs, the allegedly oppressive government, and especially the alleged slavery. Bernstein complained,

Mr. Bax acts as if the absence of capitalism in itself means the absence of need and exploitation and as if trade necessarily impoverishes a people. Such notions are beyond any serious discussion. On the other hand, Bax seems unaware that capitalism itself has its developmental history and looks different at different times, that under the pressure of modern democratic institutions and their corresponding conception of social duty it must take on a different face than when owners monopolized political power too.

Here Bernstein again employed Engels's perception that the political Superstructure might affect the social-economic Basis. Bernstein further argued that the quality of life of native people brought under European rule was often better than before. In his way of thinking, to give capitalism its due did not mean that one had abandoned Marxism. He wrote,

I refer Bax to the *Communist Manifesto*, which begins with "lavish praise" for the bourgeoisie to an extent that no hired writer could have composed more impressively. In the fifty years since the *Manifesto* was written, however, the world has not gone backwards but rather forwards. The revolutions which have since taken place in public life, the rise of modern democracy, have not left teachings about social duty unaffected.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 486-489. See earlier, 226f., 238-258, and 279-289.

For one example, Bernstein mentioned the SPD's condemnation in the Reichstag of certain activities by one colonialist in East Africa. In a footnote Bernstein rejected Bax's accusation of uncritical admiration for England or for the Liberal Party. In another footnote Bernstein riddled Bax's alleged aesthetic dislike for smokestacks even when the modern factory was often healthier than cottage industry.<sup>14</sup>

Bax had indicted Bernstein for abandoning the social-democratic standpoint in favor of reason and moderation. Bernstein responded to Bax,

According to him I should make my critique depend entirely on consideration of the great collapse which is to be accelerated and out of which socialism must necessarily arise the victor. The other stuff is secondary. The faster the great collapse is brought about, the faster socialism will be here. I confess that I can discover neither reason nor moderation in this view, rather only an unproven assumption. For me the preconditions for the "socialist final goal" include more than a generalized business crisis. But then again, according to Bax my socialism is no longer colorfast.<sup>15</sup>

Bax's accusation that Bernstein was no longer a social democrat rested on two fundamental differences between the socialism of Bax and the mature Marxism of Bernstein and Kautsky: (a) whether capitalism was an evil to be avoided or rather a relative good which could provide preconditions for socialism and (b) whether or not one could assume in detail how society would evolve. Bernstein would discuss these issues in his second essay.

To conclude the first, Bernstein attempted to rebut Bax by exhibiting what his conjectures implied in practice--just as Kautsky had described utopianism's impractical prescriptions for socialist policy. Bernstein accused Bax of dwelling upon the supposed "privileges" of English women, the nature of Sunday in Great Britain, the British monarchy, and religion.

In short, Mr. Bax's socialist spirit is set in motion by mere side issues at best. Partly political or metaphysical games,

<sup>14</sup>Bernstein, "Polemisches," pp. 490-493 and 495.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 495f.

partly pure fantasies. If we want to turn to English socialists to inform us about important questions of social legislation and administrative policy in modern England, then we must turn to the literature of such Philistines as the Fabians; we will not find any information about this in the writings of Mr. Bax.

Bernstein characterized one of Bax's specific proposals as overtly utopian. Finally Bernstein named this interpretation of Marx he had been fighting so long:

Under closer scrutiny we find that the socialism of Mr. Bax has well-known features. Eccentric hatred of Christianity and religion in general, exaggeration of the importance of the form of government, speculation about a great collapse which will probably cross over into the socialist promised land with a single jump--these are all characteristics of good, old: Blanquism. Bax's synthetic socialism dissolves into a Blanquism like that which has been almost completely overcome in France today, compounded with Marxist phrases and a considerable quantity of Bax's own idiosyncrasies.<sup>16</sup>

In the second part of his reply to Bax, Bernstein aimed to refute two notions: (a) that historical development would necessarily involve the collapse of capitalism to be followed by the sudden establishing of socialism (instead of a gradual transition from capitalism to socialism under proletarian rule) and (b) that one should uncritically follow a given prescription of how society would develop (instead of studying actual material conditions). Bernstein began with the resolution of the London Congress which called upon proletarians to learn to manage production in anticipation of an imminent economic breakdown. He insisted that the resolution fit the dominant social-democratic expectation: Social democrats pictured a massive business crisis causing widespread suffering, which would convince the people that capitalism

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 496f. For Kautsky on utopianism's impractical demands, see above, 287f.

Compare Bax, *The Religion of Socialism*, pp. 119f., and Ernest Belfort Bax, *The Ethics of Socialism. Being Further Essays in Modern Socialist Criticism* (London, n.d. [1887]), pp. 122 and 127f.

could not provide for the common good; their movement would become unstoppable; and the system would collapse.

In other words, the inevitable great economic crisis will expand into an all-encompassing social crisis, the result of which will be the political rule of the proletariat, as the only resolute revolutionary class at the time, and a complete transformation of society in the socialist sense under the rule of this class.

The expectation rested, according to Bernstein, on mental extrapolations from the current concentrating of firms, increasing number of proletarians, conflicts between workers and the capitalist classes and among the latter, the "law of competition," and the impact of economic changes on public life. Bernstein admitted that from readily observed facts a business crisis leading to a general Zusammenbruch could be inferred.

So then the conviction has established itself within social democracy that this process of development is an unavoidable natural law; and the great all-encompassing economic crisis, the unavoidable path to socialist society. Moreover, it appears to be the safest and shortest path. And once accustomed to examining economic processes and data almost exclusively for facts which support the conviction and to being occupied primarily with them, one soon arrives at the subsequent viewpoint that the great, salvation-bringing crisis cannot possibly be far away, unless unforeseen events intervene and grant the capitalist world a new reprieve.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Bernstein, "Der Kampf der Sozialdemokratie und die Revolution der Gesellschaft," part two "Die Zusammenbruchs-Theorie und die Kolonialpolitik," *Neue Zeit*, XVIa (1897-98), 548f. Earlier, 212. Bo Gustafsson, *Marxismus und Revisionismus. Eduard Bernsteins Kritik des Marxismus und ihre ideengeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*, Holger Heide, tr. (Frankfurt/M., 1972), pp. 104-108, also summarizes the second part of the article, as do Hans-Holger Paul, *Marx, Engels und die Imperialismustheorie der 2. Internationale* (Hamburg, 1978), pp. 130-132, and Pierre Angel, *Eduard Bernstein et l'Evolution du Socialisme Allemand* (Paris, 1961), pp. 142-144.

Here Bernstein claimed that the expectation of collapse arose from inferences from currently observed facts; he did not contend that the prediction was explicitly made by Marx or Engels. Yes, tendencies associated with collapse were tendencies described in the *Communist Manifesto*, in *Capital*, in the *Anti-Dühring*, or in the Erfurt Program. Yes, Marx and Engels had predicted intensifying capitalist business crises. However, one need not conclude that the tendencies led to business crises, that business crises would culminate in a historically necessary catastrophe, and that this catastrophe was essential for socialism. With this question the distinct issues of crises, collapse, and revolution merged.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, by this time Bernstein probably did think that Marx and Engels had sometimes anticipated ever-intensifying economic crises bringing collapse and revolution. Bax followed them in seeing market expansion providing a respite from crises.

Bernstein proceeded to question what he now took to be the social-democratic view by contrasting its vision of how society would develop with the facts of social change as he saw them. He was convinced that instead of arguing from certain tendencies within capitalism, social democrats should undertake a careful study of material conditions. They would discover, for example, that capital did not develop in the manner expected. Bernstein challenged the reasoning of several German social-democratic newspapers which had recently employed figures from the 1895 business census in Prussia and concluded that capitalist society could not long endure. He found that middle-sized firms were still very important. Incorporating an idea perhaps from Hobson, Bernstein argued that much detailed work belonged to the middle-sized businesses and that this kind of production was increasing. Clearly, middle-sized and large-scale production could continue together, Bernstein decided. The picture varied depending on whether one looked at competition among different-sized firms within a single line of business or rather considered the wider economy. Here Bernstein's argument somewhat resembled Kautsky's insight that the success of large-scale manufacture in one area might allow small-scale production in others. Middle-sized firms in new fields of production could arise to replace those destroyed

<sup>18</sup>See earlier, pp. 38-43.

elsewhere. Bernstein believed that social democrats had overlooked the flexibility and adaptability of modern commerce.<sup>19</sup>

Bernstein thought that the popular socialist vision of the economy better fit a past era on the eve of industrialization and that it contradicted key characteristics of the modern situation. It ignored changes like the increased use of credit and the extension of transportation. In the *Communist Manifesto* and other writings at that time, Marx and Engels recognized these factors, Bernstein acknowledged; but even they could not foresee all the advances which had occurred. Bernstein contended that a scientific-socialist commentary on the *Manifesto* would investigate not only to what extent the actual development of events conformed to the assumptions presented there but also to what extent it differed from them.<sup>20</sup>

Bernstein questioned the mid-century writings of Marx and Engels. Having concluded, apparently, that the SDF's interpretation was partly correct, Bernstein attributed Marx and Engels's alleged mistakes to their including the Hegelian dialectic in their method of analysis as well as to their overestimating economic conditions in the late 1840's.

Bernstein remarked that Marx and Engels never ignored actual developments in order to protect their assumptions. In notes to the third volume of *Capital*, Engels had described how new developments in capitalism altered the pattern of business crises: Old occasions for crises were avoided by better transportation and the spread of European capital; the pattern might vary with cartels, protective tariffs, and trusts; but the latter prepared the way for a still bigger crisis in the future. Here Bernstein disagreed; he doubted that it was necessarily true. He did not deny that a general capitalist economic crisis would ever occur; rather, he refused to predict the future either way. With further economic development, business crises like those in the past became less likely, Bernstein argued; so one might need to abandon

<sup>19</sup>Bernstein, "Die Zusammenbruchs-Theorie und die Kolonialpolitik," pp. 549-552. Compare earlier, 276 (Hobson) and 92f. (Kautsky). See also Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 204f.

<sup>20</sup>Bernstein, "Die Zusammenbruchs-Theorie und die Kolonialpolitik," pp. 552f.



speculation on them as the beginning of the socialist revolution.<sup>21</sup> To make his point that social democrats should not rest their political strategy on the expectation of an imminent Zusammenbruch, here Bernstein apparently thought it sufficient to show that collapse was neither an historical necessity nor an essential precondition of socialism. He need not prove that it would never happen.

Far from its being essential for the triumph of socialism, Bernstein feared that a Zusammenbruch in the near future might imperil the proletarian cause. He allowed that a mass uprising could bring only the SPD to power, but he warned that the party would then confront an impossible task. It would still need capitalism; yet, it could not offer capitalism sufficient security. "On this contradiction it [the SPD] would wear itself out beyond recovery, and the end could only be a colossal defeat." Bernstein estimated that the problems confronting the SPD in Germany in 1898 would be far greater than those confronting the republican government in France in 1848. The concern reflected Bernstein's discussion with Kautsky in the summer of 1896 about Proudhon and finding appropriate demands, Bernstein's work on the Héritier text, and Bernstein's opposition to encouraging workers to rely on the state as expressed in the "Problems" series and elsewhere.<sup>22</sup>

Against those who contended that a "total collapse of capitalism on its own internal contradictions" was something more than a giant business crisis, Bernstein replied that their notion of the Zusammenbruch was too vague. A simultaneous collapse of production became less likely as industry became more adaptable and more differentiated.<sup>23</sup>

Against those who asserted that a popular uprising could revolutionize the economy, Bernstein answered that they misapplied the model of the French Revolution:

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 553f. On Bernstein's views on economic crises and collapse, see above, 41-43, 172f., 182f., and also Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 206-212.

<sup>22</sup> Bernstein, "Die Zusammenbruchs-Theorie und die Kolonialpolitik," pp. 554f. See also EB-KK February 21, 1896. Earlier, 184-189, 209-211, 311-317, 326f., and 369f.

<sup>23</sup> Bernstein, "Die Zusammenbruchs-Theorie und die Kolonialpolitik," p. 555.

One could clear away most of the feudal laws without hurting more than a relatively small fraction of the population; radical changes in bourgeois property law, however, disturb an immensely larger circle of affected persons, who cannot all be told to emigrate. Feudal landed property could be broken in pieces and alienated as parcels; with modern factories, in contrast, this does not work. The more of them one expropriates following the recipe of the Commune, the more difficult it becomes to keep them going during an uprising. The increasing gravity of the situation on the surface would not be accompanied at all by an acceleration of the inner process of industrial development; rather on the contrary, the former would hamper the latter in many ways.<sup>24</sup>

Against those who assumed that the final business crisis and collapse was an essential prerequisite to socialism and who thus might conclude that he doubted their goal along with the Zusammenbruch, Bernstein declared that socialism was arriving already. In abandoning the necessary catastrophe, social democracy lost merely a slogan. Bernstein explained,

For, if we take a closer look, what are then all these agents we have enumerated for the removal or modification of the old crises? All things which at the same time constitute the preconditions and in part even the beginnings of the socialization of production and exchange.

A pure communist society would probably appear only in the distant future, Bernstein allowed. But he said that he was convinced

that even the present generation will see the realization of much socialism, if not in its patent form then still in fact. The steady growth in the area of social duties, i.e., the duties and corresponding rights of the individual vis-à-vis the society and the duties of society toward the individual; the expansion of the right of society organized in the nation or state to supervise economic life; the development of democratic self-government in the community, county, and province and the extension of the responsibilities of these

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 555. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, pp. 68-70.

entities--all this for me means development toward socialism or, if you will, the gradually carried out realization of socialism.<sup>25</sup>

Here Bernstein did not mention any need for the proletariat to conquer political power before the social transformation could take place. Following mature Marxism, Bernstein distinguished between political and social change; his debate with Bax concerned the latter; and Bernstein had fought Bax in a British context where the revolution to establish a democratic republic had already occurred and where the proletariat had already gained immense influence on the government. Nevertheless, Bernstein's omitting the political dimension would generate much confusion. To Germans some of his views could sound like state socialism in cooperation with the Junker monarchy.

In support of the piecemeal change he saw occurring, Bernstein emphasized that direct nationalization of industry would take time—for example, time to train supervisory staff committed to democracy. However, Bernstein continued,

Once the community makes appropriate use of its right to control economic conditions, the actual transfer of economic enterprises to public operation does not have the fundamental significance one generally thinks. A good factory law may contain more socialism than the nationalization of a whole group of factories.<sup>26</sup>

Hence Bernstein concluded both that social democracy had no reason to desire a *Zusammenbruch*, since it might bring disaster, and that social democrats dare not plan on a *Zusammenbruch*, since it was not historically necessary. Behind this conclusion lay the belief not that capitalism and socialism were historical opposites separated by violent rupture but rather perhaps that capitalism was the adolescent phase of an economy and society maturing into socialism.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Bernstein, "Die Zusammenbruchs-Theorie und die Kolonialpolitik," pp. 554-556.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 556.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 556. Compare Kautsky on capitalism providing the foundation of socialism, above, 373f.

Bernstein outlined two sets of tasks which social democrats should undertake to assist this maturation process. First, concerning politics, they should seek

to organize the working class politically, to educate it for democracy, and to fight for all reforms in the state which lend themselves to lifting up the working class and to transforming the state in the sense of democracy.

In other words, they should seek to establish a democratic republic and should prepare the proletariat to participate politically in this republic. Second, concerning colonialism, social democrats should fight chauvinism without dismissing all national consciousness and oppose the violation of native peoples without attempting to stop the advance of civilization. Attempts to stop the extension of capitalism would be seen as utopian and not be supported. Bernstein wrote,

The expansion of markets and of international trade relations has been one of the most powerful levers of social progress. It has promoted the development of the relations of production to an extraordinary degree and has proven to be a factor in increasing the wealth of nations. But the workers would also have an interest in the increase from that moment on when the right to form coalitions, effective worker-protection laws, and political suffrage enable them to safeguard a rising portion of the increase for themselves. The wealthier the society, the easier and safer the realization of socialism.

Bernstein believed that social democrats should be critical of colonialism when the administration of colonies was in the hands of a privileged class. But to oppose all colonialism in order to accelerate collapse he found very utopian, typical of socialist thinking sixty years before.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Bernstein, "Die Zusammenbruchs-Theorie und die Kolonialpolitik," pp. 555-557.

For various views on Bernstein's attitude toward colonialism, see A. Ascher, "Imperialists within German Social Democracy prior to 1914," *Journal of Central European Affairs*, XX (January 1961), 400-402; Ritter, *Arbeiterbewegung im Reich*, pp. 194f.; and Hans-Christoph

These sets of actions along with appropriate economic reforms and with the underlying social-economic evolution constituted the movement toward socialism which Bernstein wished to encourage. Here were political and economic demands which rested on study of material conditions and which he could think followed logically from the mature Marxism he had long shared with Kautsky. These measures stood in sharp contrast to those derived by Bax and others from a final goal of socialism--i.e., from utopian belief about how society would necessarily evolve. Perhaps it was in this sense that Bernstein wrote,

I admit openly that I have extraordinarily little patience and interest for that which one commonly understands by "final goal of socialism." This goal, whatever it is, means nothing to me; the movement, everything. And by movement I mean both the general movement of society, i.e., social progress, and also the political and economic agitation and organization to bring about this progress.<sup>29</sup>

The Revisionist Controversy had begun.

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Schröder, "Eduard Bernsteins Stellung zum Imperialismus vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, pp. 166f., 172-174, 177f., and 180f.

<sup>29</sup>Bernstein, "Die Zusammenbruchs-Theorie und die Kolonialpolitik," p. 556.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion

It has been my hypothesis that in the months from Friedrich Engels's death in August 1895 until the "Final-Goal Article" in January 1898, Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein engaged in a series of polemical battles, rejecting various interpretations of Marxism while defending and applying their own understanding, and that in the context of these polemics many issues of the Revisionist Controversy surfaced. Their opponents were often Wilhelm Liebknecht, H. M. Hyndman, and Ernest Belfort Bax; but other people were involved as well; and some of the contested ideas were popular among social democrats. The battle lines were most clearly drawn over the Eastern Question and cooperation with bourgeois parties--with Liebknecht and the SDF on one side, Kautsky and Bernstein on the other. The agrarian question led Kautsky to explore why small-scale production was not declining as expected. In controversy with the SDF in England, Bernstein found allies in the Fabians, yet remained critical of them. Polemics on South Africa and on the Ottoman Empire raised the question of colonialism, which Bax then tied to the expectation of imminent collapse. Bernstein's answer was that the continued existence of small-scale production indicated that a collapse was not desirable since the economy was not ready for general socialization. The debate on the Eastern Question and the one on Poland raised the possibilities of specific earlier positions of Marx once being mistaken or later becoming outdated. In a series of articles, Bax and Kautsky debated the meaning of Marxism. Kautsky and Bernstein emphasized the need to study actual material conditions, and they criticized socialists who thought in a utopian way or used only slogans. Bernstein's revisionism began in a critique of what he considered non-Marxist ideas. And Kautsky supported Bernstein because they basically agreed, at first.

In this time before the Revisionist Controversy, it would appear that Bernstein's thought passed through three stages: First, he believed that Marx and Engels were correct; he identified their theories with the mature Marxism of Kautsky, embodied in the Erfurt Program and the writings related to it. With Kautsky, Bernstein fought to defend this understanding of Marx against interpretations offered by Liebknecht in Germany and by the SDF in England. Bernstein thought that in their study of material conditions the Fabians were closer to Marxism than was the SDF.

Second, about October 1896, Bernstein began to suggest that certain ideas developed by Marx in mid century were no longer relevant and had in some cases been wrong to begin with. Sometimes



these appeared to be among the ideas which Liebknecht or the SDF seemed to like most of all. On some points Marx or Engels allowed that they had been mistaken. For example, Engels admitted that they had overestimated the development of industry in France in the late 1840's; and Marx's actions in the First International and afterwards contradicted some of his earlier pronouncements. In rejecting specific earlier conclusions which Marx and Engels had reached, Bernstein could see himself as following Marx and Engels themselves; and Bernstein still claimed their method of analysis. It was at this time that he criticized what he considered the Fabians' eclecticism. Still, he acknowledged that they used realistic criteria and that they sometimes arrived at results resembling those which would be obtained using Marx's method.

Third, by September 1897 Bernstein claimed to have discovered that an element of Marx's method itself was wrong and that this mistake was found in the later works of Engels, too. Perhaps in part, Bernstein came to understand "Marxism" as the interpretation of Marxism he associated with the SDF or Liebknecht. Bernstein now pictured Marx and Engels thinking at times that capitalism would have to collapse in a business crisis before socialism could succeed it. In this period of his thought, it would have been possible for Bernstein to adopt the view that the Fabians were correct in their opposing "Marxism." Kautsky was still correct, but he was no longer a "strict Marxist."

During the months from Engels's death to the beginning of the Revisionist Controversy, it seems that Kautsky's thinking also evolved. Kautsky defended his understanding of Marxism against interpretations which sought to turn historical materialism into a global philosophy or to attribute to Marxism non-Marxist ideas. In writings on the agrarian question, Kautsky revealed that for him the Erfurt Program should not be understood in a one-sided way as an exact prediction of how the economy would develop. Rather, the Erfurt Program identified tendencies which met counter-tendencies.

Then during polemics on the Eastern Question, Kautsky agreed with Bernstein that some ideas worked out by Marx were inaccurate or else were no longer relevant. Could Kautsky not have acknowledged Engels's admission in 1895 that he and Marx had been mistaken in their assessment of economic conditions in France in 1848?

In short, Kautsky went through an intellectual evolution similar to the first two stages of Bernstein's development--similar, that is, up to the point where Bernstein decided that Marx and Engels had been wrong in their method as well as in their conclusions. Kautsky did not

accept Bernstein's new interpretation of what "Marxism" really meant. This at first parallel but then divergent growth in interpreting Marxism may help to explain both why Kautsky supported Bernstein so long and also why Kautsky criticized Bernstein in the manner he did, when he finally did so--disagreeing with Bernstein on many issues, but also recognizing some of his observations as important, while denying that the collapse theory which he dismissed was Marxist.

But can one relate the events from 1895 through 1897 to those immediately afterward? Particularly, having observed the basic agreement between Kautsky and Bernstein as late as August 1897, can one account for their disagreement the following year? In January 1898 Kautsky expressed concern to Bernstein about the pessimistic tone of his articles. In February Kautsky criticized Bernstein's apparent opposition to any revolution and shared a deep concern about how his writings were being interpreted in Germany. From March 1898 Kautsky sought to increase Bernstein's responsibilities with *Neue Zeit* in order to move him from London back to Zurich. In April Kautsky explained to Adler,

We must try to get him away from London, when from a quite understandable opposition against the SDF he finally digs himself into an opposition against the whole party. He must again come into touch with the party. Perhaps he would then not think differently, but would say it differently, than today. He, who was characterized precisely by his tactfulness, has now lost any sense of how one can expose an illusion so that it is accepted by our people and not considered a concession by the opposition. I read his works with pleasure and always learn from them, but I know only too many who are confused instead of enlightened by them.

But by September 1898 Kautsky had dropped this project because he now believed that Bernstein really had abandoned Marxism. Through the summer Kautsky shared his rising doubts with Adler and Bebel, Adler recommending moderation. Then in September Zetkin asked whether Bernstein's statements had not contributed to the relatively poor showing of the SPD in the recent Reichstag elections.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kautsky to Adler, April 9, 1898, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Friedrich Adler, ed. (Vienna, 1954), pp. 245f.; KK-EB January 28, 1898; KK-EB February 18, 1898;

At the Stuttgart party congress in October, attention shifted quickly to Bernstein. Kautsky was finally forced to speak. When Bernstein later accused Kautsky of having misunderstood his arguments because of bias, Kautsky replied that Bernstein no longer defended Marxism from misinterpretation but rather had abandoned Marxism. Kautsky wrote Bernstein that he rejected

the value theory, the dialectic, materialism, the class struggle, the proletarian character of our movement, the conclusion of the chapter about original accumulation . . . what then remains of Marxism?

I do not deny that I have moulted on many points and have agreed . . . with your criticism of the party for the most part—but this was criticism of the party to the extent it did not stand on the foundation of mature Marxism, criticism of the egg shells of utopianism and Blanquism, . . . it was a cleaning of Marxism from the ideas of its predecessors, not an overcoming of Marxism.

Kautsky further expressed his opposition to Bernstein in an article for *Vorwärts* in October, Kautsky's first published attack on Bernstein. In 1899 Kautsky responded against Bernstein's *The Preconditions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy* with both articles for *Vorwärts* and *Neue Zeit* and also a book. Kautsky wanted Bernstein to

KK-EB March 22, 1898. Thomas Meyer, *Bernsteins konstruktiver Sozialismus. Eduard Bernsteins Beitrag zur Theorie des Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1977), p. 19, also cites the January 28 letter. Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854-1938. Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh, 1978), p. 122.

Bebel's hostility to Bernstein after the Stuttgart party congress is addressed by Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Das Mandat des Intellektuellen: Karl Kautsky und die Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin, 1986), pp. 155f.; Rudolf Walther, ". . . aber nach der Sündflut kommen wir und nur wir." "Zusammenbruchstheorie", *Marxismus und politisches Defizit in der SPD 1890-1914* (Frankfurt/M., 1981), p. 138; Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 124f.; and Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism. Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1962), p. 79. Zetkin to Kautsky, July 10, 1898, in Kautsky Papers D XXIII, IISH. Karen Honeycutt, "Clara Zetkin: A Left-wing Socialist and Feminist in Wilhelmian Germany," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1975, pp. 257f.

resign from the staff of *Neue Zeit*, and Kautsky was pained by Bernstein's refusal to leave voluntarily. The two men ceased corresponding regularly. Even after Bernstein's return to Germany in 1901, their enmity continued; it lasted until the World War. What events occurring in 1898 contributed to the development of this disagreement and personal bitterness despite the strong agreement and close friendship of Kautsky and Bernstein just the year before?<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps one factor leading to the disagreement between Kautsky and Bernstein in 1898 was the latter's associating "Marxism" too much with the ideas of Bax, Hyndman, Liebknecht, or others instead of with those of Kautsky. Kautsky might have felt betrayed by this identification, for together he and Bernstein had fought such interpretations of Marxism. In a report on the Stuttgart party congress written for the *Arbeiterzeitung*, Adler expressed his belief that, on the one hand, Bernstein had not abandoned the final goal of social democracy—proletarian rule and socialization of the means of production. On the other hand, Marx and Engels did not have a Zusammenbruch theory.<sup>3</sup>

Kautsky and Bernstein agreed that some of the ideas of Marx and Engels were no longer relevant. They also agreed that Marx and Engels had sometimes reached false conclusions using their historical-materialist method of analysis. But where Kautsky continued to insist

<sup>2</sup>KK-EB October 23, 1898; also quoted in Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 123. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 125, 186, and 272 note 64; Gilcher-Holtey, pp. 141-144; and Hans-Josef Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Zur Ideologie der Partei vor dem 1. Weltkrieg* (Hanover, 1967), pp. 77f.

Kautsky's articles against Bernstein included "Taktik und Grundsätze," *Vorwärts*, October 13, 1898; "Bernsteins Streitschrift," *Vorwärts*, March 16, 17, and 18, 1899; "Nochmals Bernsteins Streitschrift," *Vorwärts*, April 8, 11, and 12, 1899; "Prinzipieller Gegensatz oder Voreingenommenheit? Noch ein Wort zur Diskussion mit Bernstein," *Vorwärts*, April 26, 1899; "Bernstein und die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung," *Neue Zeit*, XVIIb (1899), 4-16; "Bernstein und die Dialektik," *Neue Zeit*, XVIIb (1899), 36-50; "Bernstein über die Werttheorie und die Klassen," *Neue Zeit*, XVIIb (1899), 68-81. Kautsky, *Bernstein und das sozialdemokratische Program. Eine Anti-Kritik* (Stuttgart, 1899).

<sup>3</sup>Adler, "Der Stuttgarter Parteitag," *Arbeiterzeitung*, October 16, 1898, in LHAP 9473, Bl. 57f.; also in *Vorwärts*, October 19, 1898, p. 5.



that this method of analysis was adequate, Bernstein began to argue that the method itself was unsound. Bernstein came to understand the Hegelian dialectic as predicting historical change through violent upheaval. He then believed that he had found this extreme dialectic not only in some of the mid-century writings of Marx and Engels but also in Engels's later writings. In contrast, Kautsky believed that Marxism called for gradual evolution of society and economy, though he feared conditions on the Continent would lead to violent political revolution. On the one hand Kautsky denied Bernstein's new belief that Marxism implied violent social revolution. On the other hand, Kautsky felt that the reactionary nature of the German government made violent political revolution probable.<sup>4</sup>

A third possible reason for the conflict between Kautsky and Bernstein in 1898 was the way Bernstein was interpreted by those claiming to agree with him. Bourgeois liberal papers reported on the polemics between Bernstein and his social-democratic critics. They alleged that Bernstein rejected basic Marxist principles and hence undermined the SPD. On February 15 Bebel wrote Kautsky, "I am sending here the *Freisinnige Zeitung* with an article by Richter, in which he assures Ede of his agreement. This is the last punishment which Ede could receive for his article." Kautsky urged Bernstein to respond against these interpretations of his arguments. For example, he wrote on January 28, 1898,

Because your articles--or better, some expressions in them--are beginning to exhibit unintended effects with friend and foe, I would advise you . . . to draw the border not only over against the descendents of the Blanquists but rather also over against the utopians of social reconciliation.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort," to *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky, Jr., ed. (Assen, 1971), p. xxxii. KK-EB February 18, 1898. Steinberg, *Sozialismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 80f.; Detlef Lehnert, "Die Rezeption Bernsteins in der 'linken' Kritik," in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus. Bericht über den wissenschaftlichen Kongreß "Die historische Leistung und aktuelle Bedeutung Eduard Bernsteins,"* Horst Heimann and Thomas Meyer, eds. (Berlin, 1978), p. 373. See earlier, 7.

<sup>5</sup>Bebel to Kautsky February 15, 1898, in *August Bebel's Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky*, Karl Kautsky, Jr., ed. (Assen, 1971), p. 103;

Kautsky was also concerned about those whom he labeled "practitioners," those social democrats who wished to concentrate on immediate reform work to the exclusion of theory. These persons could use Bernstein's statement about "final goal" and "movement" in this sense, undermining the authority of the party's theoreticians. Bernstein agreed with Kautsky on this danger and proposed a statement to *Vorwärts* to clarify the issue. But the danger remained.<sup>6</sup>

Off in London, Bernstein did not realize the impact of his writings in Germany. Years later he recalled,

I was lifted up on the shield by opponents of Marxism as its "destroyer," and in the party I was now appealed to by the supporters of an opportunistic policy in which the Marxists saw a serious danger to the proletarian character of the movement. Many a false citation, which then I had to consider a malicious falsification by my adversaries, may in reality have been a sincere paraphrase on the part of a new friend unknown to me.

Moreover, in defending his "Final-Goal Article," Bernstein focused on his strongest point: That it was wrong for the SPD to rest its policies on a supposedly imminent collapse which might not happen and which could hurt the socialist cause if it did. Bernstein recognized similarities between himself and other opponents of drastic change--including social reformers. On February 28 he wrote Kautsky,

I am a skeptic--not in regard to the workers' movement or the evolution of the society to socialism, but well in regard to our . . . views on the path of the evolution and many of our

KK-EB January 28, 1898. Lehnert, "Die Rezeption Bernsteins," pp. 356f. and 360f.

<sup>6</sup>KK-EB January 28, 1898; EB-KK February 1, 1898. Gay, p. 75. Gilcher-Holtey, p. 153, argues that what most upset Kautsky was Bernstein's lack of concern for theory.



preconceptions. In this respect Parvus was not wrong when he placed me with Sombart, Herkner, and Platter.<sup>7</sup>

A fourth possible factor turning Kautsky against Bernstein over the course of 1898 was the sharp criticism Bernstein received from a number of leading socialist intellectuals--including Parvus, Plekhanov, and Luxemburg. In attacking specific ideas which they associated with Bernstein, these critics contributed to the view that he in fact held them--when in some cases he did not.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Bernstein, "Entwicklungsgang eines Sozialisten," in *Die Volkswirtschaftslehre der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, Felix Meiner, ed. (Leipzig, 1924), I, 30f., is quoted on p. xxxix in Karl Kautsky, Jr., "Vorwort." EB-KK February 28, 1898. EB-KK February 21, 1898; Kautsky to Paul Axelrod, March 9, 1898, in Axelrod Papers, A(5) 24 I, IISH. Meyer, *Bernsteins Sozialismus*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup>In EB-KK February 1, 1898, Bernstein complained about being misinterpreted by Parvus.

The outstanding example of the left-wing attack on Bernstein is Luxemburg's "Sozialreform oder Revolution?" in *Gesammelte Werke*, Institute for Marxism-Leninism, ed. (Berlin, 1970ff.), I/1, 367-466; first published as a single work in 1899, it was based on articles she wrote for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.

Descriptions of the left-wing attack on Bernstein are found in Horst Bartel, "Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Marxismus und Revisionismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Beiträge*, XIX (1977), 207f.; J. Peter Netti, *Rosa Luxemburg*, (New York, 1966), I, 137-169; and Gay, pp. 262-269.

In his article, "Die Rezeption Bernsteins," pp. 353-383, Lehnert argues that many interpretations of Bernstein are based on misinterpretations of him. See also Roger Fletcher, "The Life and Work of Eduard Bernstein," in *Bernstein to Brandt: A Short History of German Social Democracy*, Roger Fletcher, ed. (London, 1987), p. 47 note 2.

At first Kautsky believed that the left wing was misinterpreting Bernstein. However, as the year 1898 progressed, Bernstein's polemics with the left and his identifying himself with social reformers gradually convinced Kautsky that he and his friend were deeply separated. The left's attack revealed to Kautsky ways in which Bernstein went against the party's understanding.<sup>9</sup> And in these polemics Bernstein used novel arguments with which Kautsky did not agree.<sup>10</sup>

Over the course of the year 1898, Kautsky reluctantly decided that his friend had turned from the Marxism they had once upheld. The ideas and events which dominated the lives of Kautsky and Bernstein in the months from Engels's death in August 1895 until the beginning of the Revisionist Controversy in January 1898 can, in my opinion, be related to the intellectual and political developments which followed.

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<sup>9</sup>KK-EB, January 28, 1898. Kautsky to Paul Axelrod, March 9, 1898, in Axelrod Papers, A(5) 24 I, IISH. Reinhold Hünlich, *Karl Kautsky und der Marxismus der II. Internationale* (Marburg, 1981), p. 40. Thomas Meyer, "Karl Kautsky im Revisionismusstreit und sein Verhältnis zu Eduard Bernstein," in *Marxismus und Demokratie. Karl Kautskys Bedeutung in der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung*, Jürgen Rojahn, Till Schelz-Brandenburg, and Hans-Josef Steinberg, eds. (Frankfurt/M. and New York, 1992), pp. 61-63, mentions several reasons for Kautsky's turning against Bernstein in 1898. Marek Waldenberg, *WZŁOT I UPADEK KAROLA KAUTSKY'EGO--Studium z historii myśli społecznej i politycznej* (The Rise and Fall of Karl Kautsky--A Study in the History of Social and Political Thought) (Krakow, 1972), I, Chapter Three, addresses the question of the gradual change in Kautsky's attitude toward Bernstein and of the role of the left in causing this change.

<sup>10</sup>For example, Bernstein's article "Das realistische und das ideologische Moment im Sozialismus," *Neue Zeit*, XVIb (1898), 225-232 and 388-395. Gilcher-Holtey, p. 137.

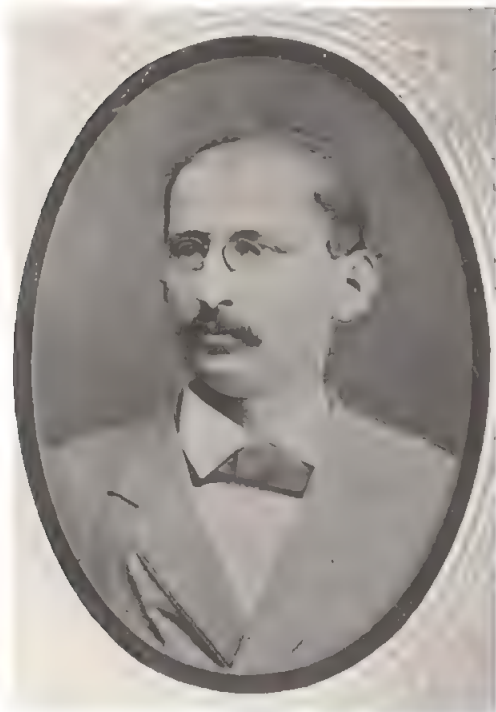
## Appendix: Photographs

The following photographs have been reproduced with the permission and cooperation of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.

1. Karl Kautsky (1854-1938). In 1889
2. Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932). Before or about 1881
3. August Bebel (1840-1913). Before or about 1898
4. Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826-1900). Before or in 1897
5. Ernest Belfort-Bax (1854-1926). In or before 1896
6. H. M. Hyndman (1842-1921).
7. Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919). About 1898 to 1900
8. Clara Zetkin (1857-1933). About 1901 to 1902
9. Beatrice Webb (1858-1943). In or before 1896
10. Sidney Webb (1859-1947). In or before 1896
11. George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950). About 1894, perhaps
12. Hubert Bland (1856-1914). In 1902
13. James Keir Hardie (1856-1915). In 1892
14. James Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937). Before or around 1894
15. SPD delegates to the Bavarian provincial diet: Grillenberger, Löwenstein, Ehrhart, Scherm, and Vollmar. In 1893
16. London Congress of the Second International. In 1896



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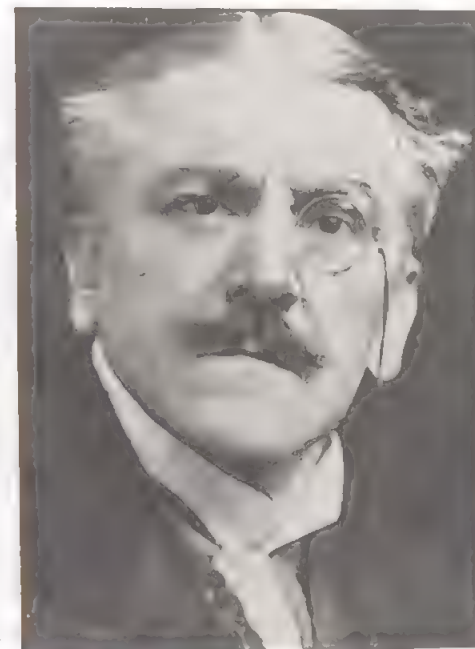
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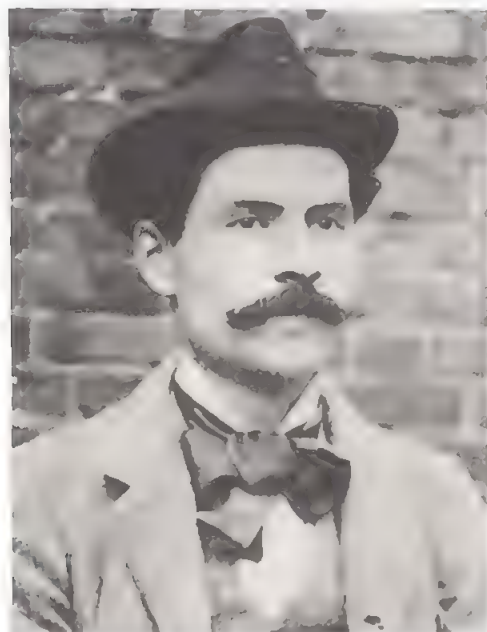
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##### Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv Potsdam (LHAP)

Rep. 30, Province Brandenburg, C Polizei-Präsidium Berlin, Tit. 94:

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 9419  | Internationale Congresse. Internationaler Socialistischer Arbeiter- und Genossenschaft-Congreß in London vom 27 Juli bis 1 August 1896. |
| 9430  | Partei-Congreß der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands in Halle an der Saale im Oktober 1890  |
| 9434  | Programm der Sozialdemokratischen Partei und der Partei-Congreß der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands in Erfurt im Oktober 1891             |
| 9461  | Congreß der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands im Jahre 1895 in Breslau  |
| 9468  | Congreß der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands im Jahre 1896 in Gotha  |
| 9469  | Congreß der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands im Jahre 1897 in Hamburg  |
| 9473  | Congreß der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands im Jahre 1898 in Stuttgart  |
| 9621  | Sozialdemokratische Bewegung in Deutschland 1893-1899   |
| 12984 | Sozialdemokratische Bestrebungen  |
| 13033 | Die sozialdemokratische und communistische Arbeiterpartei in London   |
| 13128 | Die sozialdemokratische Bewegung in Berlin  |

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14920 Arbeiterversammlungen 1896

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Reichsamt des Innern:

13579/1 Internationale Sozialisten-Kongresse

13687 Maßregeln gegen die Sozialdemokratie

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Fabian Society Papers, Nuffield College, Oxford

Sections: A-Correspondence, B-Early Papers and Memorials,  
C-Executive Committee and Lectures

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Papers: Axelrod, Bebel, Bernstein, Family Kautsky, Kautsky,  
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(*Neue Zeit* is perhaps the single most important source for the study of Bernstein and Kautsky in the 1890's. It and *Vorwärts* contain literally hundreds of articles by them and hundreds more pertaining to their thought. Listing these articles separately would expand this bibliography by dozens of pages. I have chosen not to do this since adequate reference is provided in the footnotes and since a thorough bibliography of Kautsky's writings exists and extensive listings of Bernstein's works are available. I shall note these resources below.)

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